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**The English Rothschild Family in the Vale of Aylesbury
their houses, collections, and collecting activity 1830-1900**

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**The English Rothschild Family in the Vale of
Aylesbury: their houses, collections, and
collecting activity, 1830-1900**

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King's College London

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

This study focuses on the English branch of the Rothschild family from the 1830s to 1900, specifically the family's early activity in the Vale of Aylesbury. The acquisition and renovation or building by the Rothschild family of seven country houses is explored, in particular the reasons why the family chose to build such residences and to settle in the Vale of Aylesbury. The context of the construction of these houses, their functions, and the family's aims in building them is considered. The architectural styles chosen for the mansions are surveyed.

The interiors of the properties, their style and functions, are also investigated. The collections of fine and decorative art objects amassed by the Rothschild family and kept in these properties are examined. The motivations behind creating certain interior styles of decoration and establishing and maintaining the collections are considered. Furthermore the existence of the phrase *le goût Rothschild* as expressed by these residences is discussed. This survey reveals that even though the Rothschild family were not unique in the styles and objects they admired or acquired for their houses, the manner of presentation they employed had certain noteworthy characteristics. These were aspects which enabled Rothschild family members to project a certain image of themselves through their country properties.

This thesis concludes that the decision by the Rothschild family to acquire country mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury and to present them in particular way was motivated by the family members' specific circumstances and personal preferences. It also considers that in their sheer number, size and architectural style, as well as interior presentation, the mansions played a significant and premeditated role in maintaining and bolstering the rising social position of the Rothschilds as a *nouveau-riche* family in the nineteenth century.

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Acknowledgements

The research for this thesis was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under its Doctoral Awards Scheme and I would like to gratefully acknowledge its support. In addition my primary research could not have been undertaken without the assistance of the Rothschild Archive London and I am grateful to have been able to collaborate with the archive on this project. Specifically the assistance of Melanie Aspey, Natalie Broad, Justin Cavernelis-Frost and the advice of Dr Michael Hall has been invaluable.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance given to me whilst undertaking this primary research from the staff at the National Monuments Record Centre (English Heritage), Swindon; the National Trust; the National Art Library, London; the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury; 'Save Britain's Heritage'; and Chatsworth Archive.

The advice of several members of staff at the Wallace Collection and the Victoria and Albert Museum has also been invaluable and guided my research: at the former organisation Susanne Higgot and Dr Helen Jacobsen, and at the latter Dr Barbara Lasic and Dr Tessa Murdoch. The ability to access certain papers in Dr Murdoch's personal collection was especially appreciated.

At the surviving Rothschild properties themselves several staff members and associated individuals have assisted me in accessing the buildings and additional primary source material. These include Jane Foy, Campaign Director at Tring Park School; Squadron Leader Mark Hainsworth at RAF Halton, and staff at the Halton Museum; Dr Ulrich Leben, Pippa Shirley and Diane Bellis at Waddesdon Manor, as well as Philippa Glanville the former Academic Director here. I would like to especially thank the current Earl and Countess of Rosebery for their hospitality at Dalmeny House, in particular Lady Rosebery for her generous help with access to certain primary sources owned by the Rosebery family.

The advice and guidance of my supervisors Professor Richard Roberts at King's College London and Professor Peter Mandler at the University of Cambridge has been invaluable and most welcome. Dr Virginia Preston at King's College London has also provided

essential administrative support. In addition the assistance of Robert Harris, in proof reading the entire text is most gratefully acknowledged. Finally I would like to thank my parents for their unwavering support throughout my career so far, this thesis is dedicated to them.

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Introductory Notes

This thesis focuses on the following properties and individuals:

- At Mentmore House (constructed 1850-55) Mayer Amschel de Rothschild (1818-1874).
- At Aston Clinton House (purchased 1849, renovated and extended 1855 onwards) Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild (1810-1876).
- At Tring Park House (purchased 1872, renovated and extended 1870s-80s) Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879) and Nathan Mayer de Rothschild, 1st Baron Rothschild (1840-1915).
- At Halton House (constructed 1880-83) Alfred Charles de Rothschild (1842-1918).
- At Ascott House (purchased 1860, renovated and extended 1870s and 80s) Leopold de Rothschild (1845-1917).
- At Waddesdon Manor (constructed 1874-1884) Ferdinand James de Rothschild (1839-1898).
- At Eythrope Pavillion (constructed 1870s) Alice Charlotte von Rothschild (1847-1922).

For ease of reading, throughout this thesis the English Rothschild family members named above have been referred to on first name terms.

Since it has been the intention of this thesis to focus primarily on an examination of the country houses of the English Rothschild family, the chapter order has been determined by the date of construction of each house, rather than the acquisition of each estate by the family.

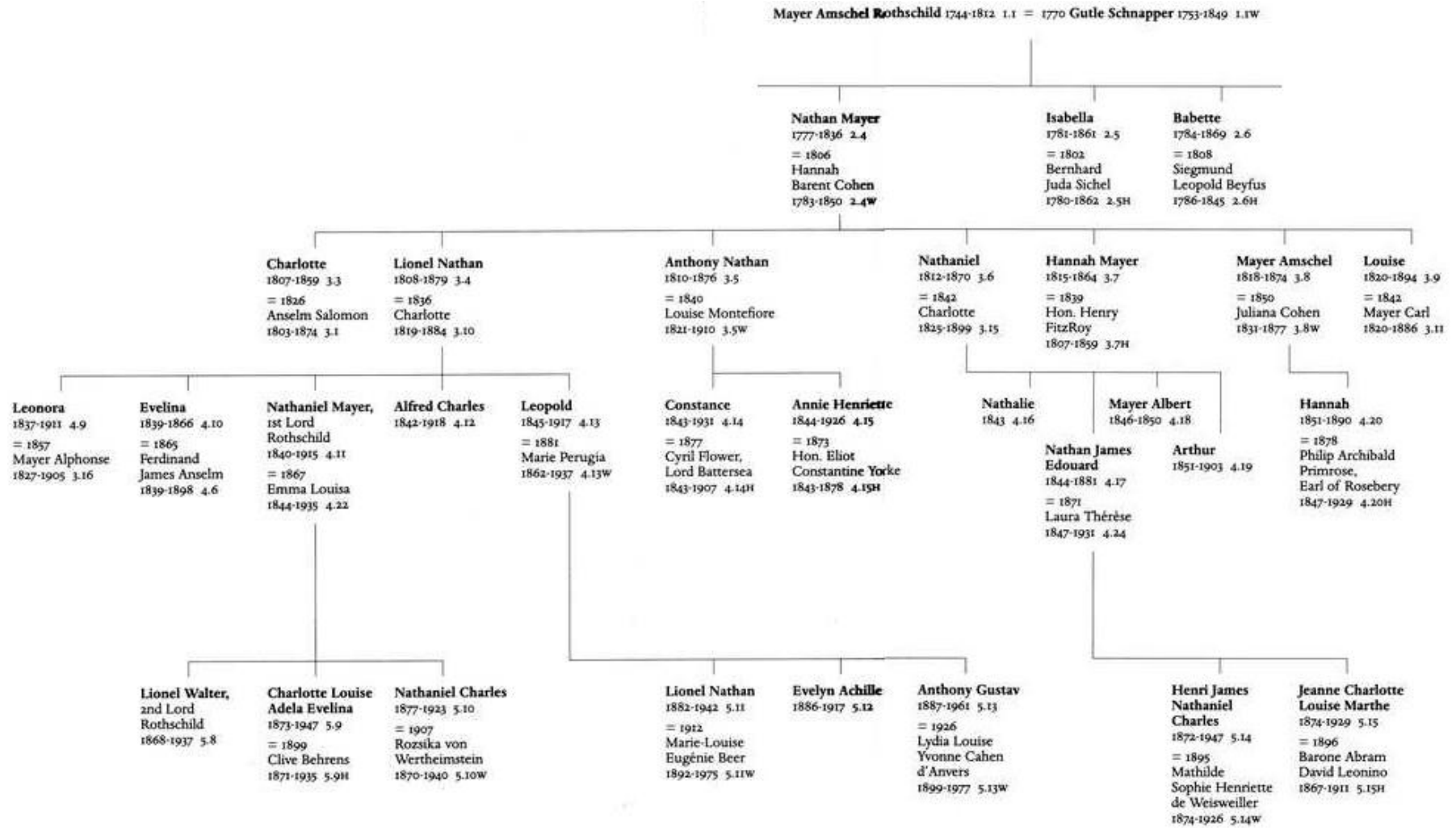
Ascott House and Waddesdon Manor are today owned and under the management of the National Trust: as a result of this a great deal of detailed scholarship has already been undertaken into the history of these buildings and their interiors and collections. It has not been the intention to repeat existing scholarship in this thesis and therefore the discussions of these two properties have been presented primarily to complete the survey of Rothschild mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury.

A complication in the examination of the English Rothschild's choices in architecture and collecting lies in the fact that generally family members possessed more than one residence: frequently a London town house was combined with a country mansion. There has not been space in this thesis to consider the interiors and collections of these town houses in detail; further work could therefore be undertaken to create a more complete impression of the English Rothschild family's choices in interior decoration and collecting in the nineteenth century. In addition whilst this thesis tries to be selective and as accurate as possible, it must be remembered that the divisions between the collections of fine and decorative art kept at these town and country residences were not always clear-cut.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
BLA	Bedfordshire and Luton Archives, Bedford, Bedfordshire
CBS	Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
DACHT	Dacorum Heritage Trust, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire
HALS	Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies Centre, Hertford, Hertfordshire
H&J	Horwood and James Papers, Rothschild Archive, London
LMA	London Metropolitan Archive, London
NAL	National Art Library, London
NMRC	National Monuments Records Centre, Swindon, Wiltshire
RAL	Rothschild Archive, London
RCHM	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

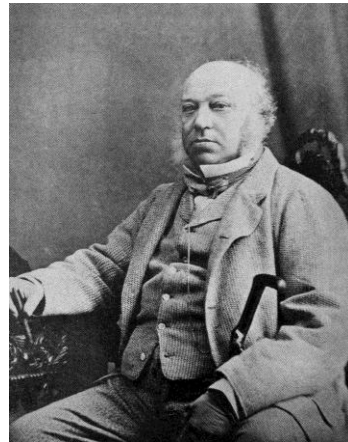
The English Rothschilds of the Nineteenth Century, Family Tree



The English Rothschild Family in the Vale of Aylesbury



Mentmore House and Mayer Amschel de Rothschild (1818-1874)



Aston Clinton House and Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild (1810-1876)



Tring Park House and Nathaniel Mayer de Rothschild, 1st Baron Rothschild (1840-1915)



Halton House and Alfred Charles de Rothschild (1842-1918)



Ascott House and Leopold de Rothschild (1845-1917)



Waddesdon Manor and Ferdinand James de Rothschild (1839-1898)



Eythrope Pavillion and Alice Charlotte von Rothschild (1847-1922)

Introduction

A number of substantial volumes have been written which chronicle the rise of the Rothschild family from their humble origins in the eighteenth century to positions of wealth and political or social eminence less than a century later. It has been common to begin with Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1744-1812), who laid the foundations for the family's banking business in the Judengasse in Frankfurt, and to discuss the subsequent success of the family throughout Europe. Much has been written also on the achievements of his son, Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1836), the founder of the Rothschild's London banking house and a leading force in the rise of the Rothschild bank to the pinnacle of the European financial world. As a result of Nathan Mayer's success, by the mid-nineteenth century the English branch of the Rothschild family was already extremely rich, and its members were known to wield great power in financial circles. This success was built upon by subsequent generations of English Rothschilds who soon possessed significant social and political influence in Britain: by the end of the nineteenth century the family obtained the first ever peerage to be given to a British Jew and were welcomed into the company of great society figures, achieving considerable social and political recognition. The successful assimilation of the family into English society, particularly considering their German and *nouveau-riche* origins and Jewish faith, must be seen as a remarkable achievement. By the end of the nineteenth century they were infamous, known especially for being ubiquitous, socially dynamic, and immensely wealthy.

Instead of being another traditional study of the history of the Rothschild family in Europe this thesis focuses on a specific part of the history of this famous family. The activity of the English branch of the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury in the nineteenth century is examined. Here in the British countryside the Rothschilds, a newly-wealthy family, participated enthusiastically in what may be considered as traditional aristocratic activities. The position of the Rothschild family in British society in this period is considered, with particular reference to their Jewish and *nouveau-riche* background. It is shown that the acquisition of country estates and establishment of country properties by them were typical actions of a *nouveau-riche* family whose members had the financial means and inclination to participate in country living. When and how certain family members embarked upon this course of action, why they did so and what sort of country houses they created is examined. It is shown that the running of estates in the Vale, the building or rebuilding of

properties on them, the choice of architectural style, presentation of the interiors, and use or function of each residence met some very specific requirements for the family. The reasons behind the acquisition and construction of each of the country properties in the Vale of Aylesbury and the architectural styles chosen for them was specific to, and varied between, each Rothschild family member.

The interiors of these residences are investigated and English Rothschild family members as collectors are examined. A study of each property reveals the particular objects that English Rothschild family members collected, the interior styles they most favoured, and the particular mode of display they implemented. This enables a further understanding of the functions of the Rothschild country properties and the lives of the Rothschild family members who resided in them. It is shown that the English Rothschild family shared a preference for a certain manner of presentation in the interiors of their homes of the Vale of Aylesbury: what exactly this entailed is discussed. The nature and origins of the Rothschild style, and how it related to the family's position as *nouveau-riche* landowners and country house owners, will be considered. How the Rothschild residences of the Vale of Aylesbury were presented in a manner which has become so renowned and considered as distinctive is revealed. It is asserted that the exterior and interior of the Rothschild country mansions combined to create a specific aesthetic and particular image which was presented by the family to the rest of society. Whether the Rothschild family imitated and endorsed existing trends in architecture and collecting, or instead established their own tastes and distinctive style, challenging accepted modes of display, is explored. How their tastes and preferences in such matters influenced, or were influenced by, contemporary collectors is also considered.

Chapter One

The English Rothschild Family and the Vale of Aylesbury

The Rothschild family's association with the Vale of Aylesbury was begun by the second generation of the family to reside in England. Three brothers of this generation, Lionel Nathan (1808-1879), Anthony Nathan (1810-1876) and Mayer Amschel de Rothschild (1818-1874), began to buy up large tracts of land in the Vale of Aylesbury from the 1840s onwards. Lionel's three sons and Austrian nephew continued in this course of action as the century progressed. The extent of the family's land holdings (which amounted to around 30,000 acres by the end of the nineteenth century) and their noteworthy social standing were such that the Vale of Aylesbury was often referred to as 'Rothschildshire'.¹ More controversially, the area was occasionally even dubbed 'Jewdaea'.²

In the course of the nineteenth century Rothschild family members established themselves in the Vale as model English country gentlemen, maintaining a renowned stag hunt, eminent stud farm and acting as exemplary landlords. At the end of the nineteenth century *Country Life* noted that:

The English members of the family have entered with zest into the occupations of country life. Whatever interests agriculture, the hunting field, or the Turf keenly interests several among them.³

They were also actively involved in local politics, serving as County Sheriffs, JPs and Lieutenants, as well as representing Buckinghamshire in the House of Commons. In addition they purchased or built great country houses, which they adorned with magnificent collections of pictures, furniture and *objets d'art*.

In many ways the English Rothschilds were a typical nineteenth century *parvenu* family: in purchasing land in the countryside, establishing country residences, and pursuing the lifestyle of country gentlemen (albeit part-time), Lionel de Rothschild, his brothers and

¹ Cecil Roth, *The Magnificent Rothschilds* (London: R. Hale, 1939), p. 150.

² R.S. Surtees, *Ask Mamma* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1858), p. 282.

³ 'Country Homes: Ascott', *Country Life Illustrated*, II (1897), 210-212.

sons, were no different to hundreds of other *nouveau-riche* families. Indeed it was frequently assumed by nineteenth-century contemporaries that when an individual amassed enough money they would contemplate the move to the countryside (even if part-time and through rental rather than purchase): *The Spectator* of 1872 considered that acquiring 'a place' in the country had always been money's priority, unless of course its owner was 'abnormally unEnglish'.⁴ The second and third generations of the English Rothschild family had made money, and were 'determined to use it and enjoy it'. The purchases of property in the countryside were therefore logical.⁵

The English Rothschilds: Nathan Mayer Rothschild and his sons

Nathan Mayer Rothschild was the first Rothschild to settle in England. Born in Frankfurt, he was the first of his generation to leave the Judengasse and establish a new branch of the family business. He settled in England in 1798, initially as a textile merchant in Manchester and subsequently as a successful London bill broker. It was Nathan who moved the English branch of the Rothschild bank to New Court, St Swithin's Lane (City of London) in 1809 and who purchased the family's first town house in 1825 at 107 Piccadilly, as well as their first 'out of town' residence at Gunnersbury Park, then west of London. Gunnersbury was enlarged and improved for Nathan and his family, who quickly adapted to a more luxurious way of life there. Even with these lifestyle changes and a substantial increase in personal wealth Nathan never accepted a title, despite the honours he was offered (for example in 1818 he was granted noble status by the Emperor of Austria, and so was permitted to style himself Baron, yet never did).

⁴ 'The Fascination of Money', *The Spectator*, 23 November 1872, pp. 1454-5 and 1486-7.

⁵ Hannah Rothschild, *The Baroness: the Search for Nica, the Rebellious Rothschild* (London: Virago Press, 2012), p. 62.



Figure 1: Nathan Mayer and Hannah Rothschild and their Children, by W. A. Hobday with (left to right) Nathan, Mayer, Louisa, Hannah, Chilly, Hannah Mayer, Lionel, Anthony and Nathaniel, c.1821

Nathan Mayer's eldest son, Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1808-1874), was the main business heir of the English house and consequently admitted to the family partnership in 1836. Lionel's greatest contribution to the bank was the loan he granted the British Government in 1875 for the procurement of the Khedive of Egypt's share in the Suez Canal. As the head of the bank after his father's death in 1836, Lionel led a demanding life splitting his time between a grand residence in Piccadilly, London, and Gunnersbury Park. Lionel fought a long campaign to become a Jewish MP and finally took his seat as Liberal Member for the City of London in 1858, some 11 years after he was first elected.

Nathan Mayer's second son, Anthony Nathan de Rothschild (1810-1876), also became a partner in the bank in 1836. Anthony's legacy lies in his management of the Chemin de fer du Nord and the Royal Mint Refinery in London from 1852. In 1847 Queen Victoria awarded Anthony a baronetcy, enabling him to style himself as 'Sir Anthony de Rothschild'.⁶ As a partner in the bank, and with his younger brothers little involved in the business, a good deal of the responsibility for affairs at New Court fell to Anthony. He was well-liked and jovial, he made friends easily and his residence in Buckinghamshire became

⁶ This title had first been offered to Lionel de Rothschild in recognition of the Rothschild bank's success and his rising political position. When Lionel decided he could not accept it he was persuaded by his family to have it conferred on his brother Anthony de Rothschild. For Lionel's motivations in declining the title see Derek Wilson, *Rothschild: A Story of Wealth and Power* (London: Deutsch, 1988), pp. 146-148.

an active venue for society figures, including the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge. Anthony took pleasure in country living and enjoyed riding and hunting. He also bred racehorses from his stables in the Vale of Aylesbury. He was appointed as High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1871. Anthony was active in the Jewish community, strongly supporting the Jews' Free School and serving as presiding warden of the Great Synagogue, and as the first president of the United Synagogue.

Nathaniel de Rothschild (1812-1870) was Nathan Mayer's third son. At the age of 30 he married his French cousin, Charlotte de Rothschild (1825-1899), and soon after emigrated to Paris to assist in running the French house of the Rothschild bank. In spite of this he still played a part in the English Rothschilds' business and settlement in the Vale of Aylesbury, writing to his brothers almost daily.

Nathan's youngest son, Mayer Amschel de Rothschild (1818-1874), was the first of the family to receive an education at an English university (studying at Magdalene and Trinity College, Cambridge). He and his wife, Juliana (1831-1877, née Cohen), were the first of the family to take up permanent residence in the Vale of Aylesbury in the 1850s. Although a partner in the bank, Mayer spent relatively little time at New Court. Instead his interest lay in the turf, and at Mentmore he established a highly successful stud farm. He was also a keen hunter in the countryside of the Vale of Aylesbury and took a great interest in farming. Mayer became High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1847 and was elected Liberal MP for Hythe in 1859.

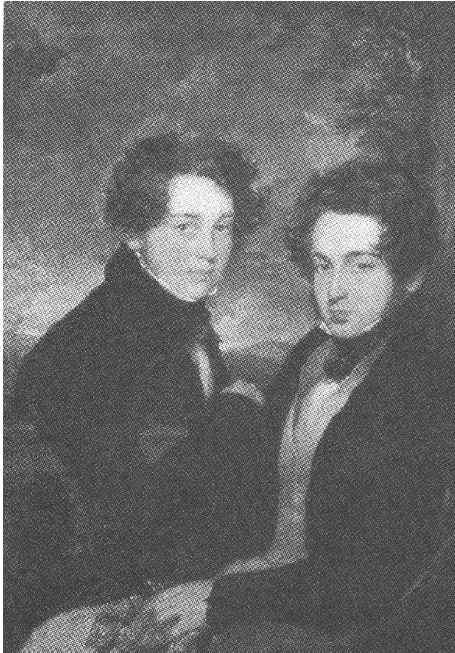


Figure 2: Lionel Nathan and Anthony Nathan de Rothschild, by M.D. Oppenheim, c.1827



Figure 3: Lionel Nathan de Rothschild in later life, c. 1860s-70s

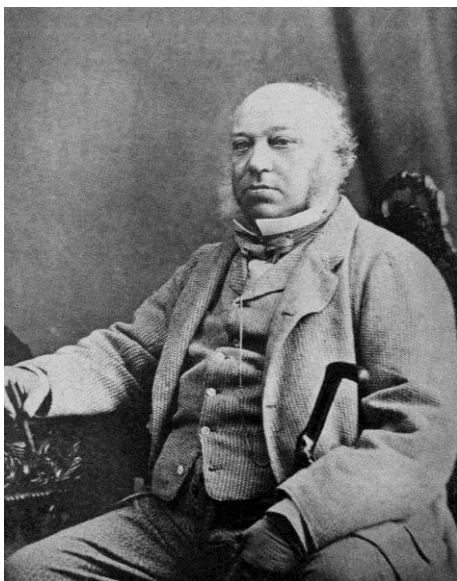


Figure 4: Anthony Nathan de Rothschild in later life, c. 1860s-70s



Figure 5: Nathaniel de Rothschild, by M.D. Oppenheim, c. 1827



Figure 6: Mayer Amschel de Rothschild, with Mentmore Towers in the distance, c. 1850s



Figure 7: Mayer Amschel de Rothschild, by Maull & Polyblank, 1860s (National Portrait Gallery)

The English Rothschild family's first experience of country-style living was at Gunnersbury Park. This residence was a suitable venue for Nathan Mayer to entertain clients and friends in a country location but lay close enough to London for business. After their

father's death however Lionel and his brothers chose to concentrate their own investments in land and property further from London in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire from the 1850s onwards. It has been suggested that the Rothschild family's association with property in the Vale of Aylesbury began much earlier than this. Miriam Rothschild suggests that Nathan Mayer had rented Tring Park, Hertfordshire, in the 1830s.⁷ There is however no existing evidence to support this claim. The only surviving document connecting the family with Tring Park before the 1840s is an insurance certificate issued to the then owner William Kay in April 1824 for the 'manor of Tring Park and its contents' by the Alliance Assurance Company, signed by Nathan as Director.⁸ Other authors, including Andrew Adam, have furthermore asserted it was Nathan Mayer's wife, Hannah de Rothschild (1783–1850, née Barent-Cohen), who first bought a few acres of land at Mentmore for her sons in 1836 so that they could enjoy some healthy exercise away from the city.⁹ It is presumed that Mayer inherited the land from his mother and added to this initial purchase as more land became available. However documentary evidence which supports the assertion that Hannah purchased land in the Vale of Aylesbury in the 1830s has not been identified.

⁷ Miriam Rothschild, *Dear Lord Rothschild: Birds, Butterflies and History* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 98.

⁸ RAL, oversized accessions/1, Insurance agreement: Alliance Assurance Company to William Kay Esq. for Tring Park House and contents, 5 April 1824.

⁹ Andrew Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets: the book of Halton* (Buckingham: Barracuda Books, 1983), p. 14; Virginia Cowles, *The Rothschilds: a Family of Fortune* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p.118; George F. Chadwick, *The Works of Sir Joseph Paxton* (London: The Architectural Press, 1961), p.188; John Martin Robinson, 'Architecture and Setting', in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Marcus Binney and Sophie Andreae (Save Britain's Heritage, 1977), pp. 5.

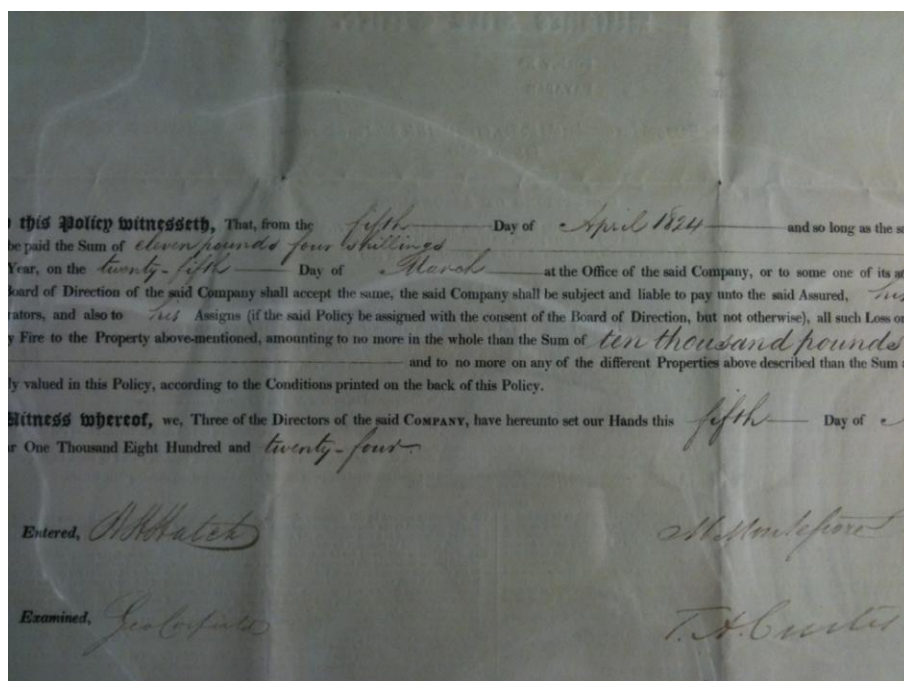
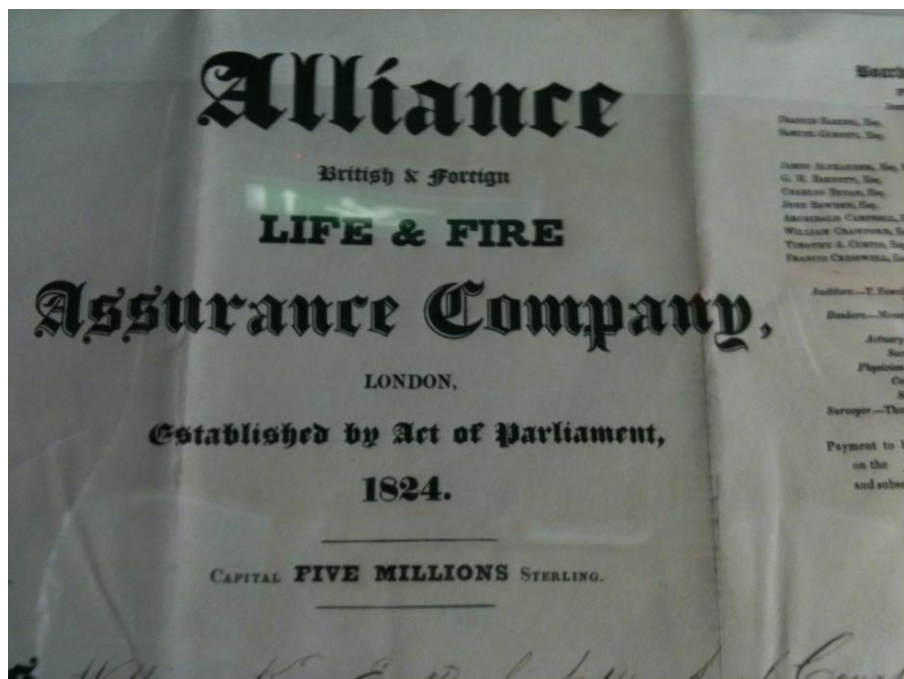


Figure 8: Insurance Agreement: Alliance Assurance Company to William Kay Esq. for Tring Park House and Contents, 5 April 1824 (RAL, oversized accessions/1)

Even if they did not reside in Buckinghamshire as early as the 1830s however the foundations of a wish to maintain a country property and purchase country estates were laid early in the lives of Lionel, Anthony and Mayer. Nathan Mayer and his wife did a great deal to ensure their children's upbringing reflected the family's rising status and instil in them a sense of ambition for position. Even before acquiring Gunnersbury Park, Nathan had decided to rent a property in Stoke Newington in 1816 to provide a moderate country retreat for his wife and children. In addition the boys were educated at a Jewish boarding school, later toured the Continent with a private tutor and completed their studies at leading Universities (Lionel, Anthony and Nathaniel at Göttingen, Mayer at Cambridge). The brothers had been raised by a mother who was ambitious for her sons, and Richard Davis suggests that probably as a result of being born an Englishwoman she 'had more of a hankering for titles and other social distinctions' than her husband.¹⁰ Letters reveal it was often Hannah who encouraged her sons to appear in society, to make contact with the leading figures of the day and to use their Austrian title of 'Baron'. It was she who entered Mayer at Cambridge and who urged her sons to become active in politics. Some writers say it was Hannah who advised them to acquire country estates, and as Richard Wilson claims 'generally to take up their "birthright" as members of a British elite'.¹¹ This parental ambition must have made a great impression on the brothers in their youth and encouraged an interest in the acquisition of land and property.

The Rothschild family and the Vale of Aylesbury 1830 to 1840

Surviving evidence suggests that it was different circumstances which first brought Lionel and his brothers to the Vale of Aylesbury. George Ireland has shown that as early as the 1830s they had been participants in fox and stag hunts in the Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire countryside and had been socialising with local landowners.¹² Ireland notes that by the 1840s Lionel and his brothers were hunting with the Royal Buckhounds from

¹⁰ Richard Davis, *The English Rothschilds* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 55.

¹¹ Wilson, *Rothschild*, p. 142.

¹² George Ireland, *Plutocrats* (London: John Murray, 2007), pp. 106-122. For example they were already acquainted with Harvey Combe and his Old Berkley foxhounds, and so already knew the hunt country around Tring. See RAL, 000/184, B17Anth 1836/25, Anthony de Rothschild to Nathaniel de Rothschild, (undated) 1836; RAL, 000/184, B17Anth 1836/44, Anthony to Nathaniel, (undated) 1836; RAL, XI/109/33/1/47, Anthony to Nathaniel, Frankfurt, 24 October (1832); Constance, Lady Battersea, *Reminiscences* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd, 1922); M. F. Berry, *A History of the Puckeridge Hunt* (London: Country Life, 1950) pp. 20-30

Ascot who frequented Buckinghamshire.¹³ David Kessler also writes that 'by 1835 the boys were enjoying hunting with the Puckeridge, a Hertfordshire hunt which was accessible from London'.¹⁴

It was probably these early hunting experiences which encouraged the brothers to form their own pack of staghounds and to begin a serious association with the Vale in late 1838.¹⁵ In addition they were Liberals, and most of the established hunts in the area were organised by the Tory Duke of Buckingham; thus they may have preferred to own their own pack of staghounds.¹⁶ Only certain counties lent themselves well to stag hunting: Surrey, Kent, Essex, Buckinghamshire or Hertfordshire being the most popular. As *Baily's Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* explained:

Of all the counties where sport is pursued there is none so given over to stag-hunting as [Buckinghamshire] it is a country far more accessible from London, and one over which the lovers of deer-hunting can disport themselves all the winter through.¹⁷

As Ireland and Kessler assert, the brothers were familiar with the countryside of the Vale of Aylesbury and had already participated in hunting around the countryside in the early-nineteenth century. It seemed a natural progression that when they wished to establish their own pack it would be around Aylesbury. The Vale in particular offered excellent sport in the hunting field.¹⁸ In 1830 it was a wild, rough and thinly populated area with an abundance of woodlands and open pastures. Long grass and deep ditches made the area 'one of the finest hunting grounds in the country'.¹⁹ It was Lionel who bought an existing pack of hounds (the Astar Harriers) and kennels from a Mr Adamson at Hastoe near Tring Park: in 1840 he formally agreed to rent the 'Tring Park Mansion Stabling and Coach

¹³ Ireland, p. 122. Ireland does not cite the sources for his assertions here.

¹⁴ See David Kessler, *The Rothschilds and Disraeli, In Buckinghamshire, an essay* (Buckinghamshire: Rothschild Waddesdon Ltd, 1996), p. 10. Kessler does not cite the sources upon which his conclusions are based.

¹⁵ Originally fox and hare hounds, the pack was instead employed by the Rothschilds as staghounds.

¹⁶ Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor: the Heritage of a Rothschild House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams with Waddesdon Manor, 2002), p. 35.

¹⁷ 'Notes from the Stag-hunting Country', *Baily's Magazine of Sport and Pastimes*, (March 1851), 24.

¹⁸ Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 179.

¹⁹ As described in *The Victoria History of the County of Buckingham*, ed. by William Page, 4 vols (London: Archibald Constable, St Catherine Press, 1908), II.

Houses'.²⁰ The Rothschilds' pack received a warm welcome from the local sporting gentry and was a popular addition to the local hunting scene with both landowners and farmers.²¹



Figure 9: Full Cry, after Sir Francis Grant, with (left to right) Nathaniel, Lionel, Mayer Amschel and Anthony de Rothschild riding to hounds in the Vale of Aylesbury

There soon appeared some difficulties with this arrangement to merely rent stabling at Tring Park however. The hounds at least once escaped their kennels and attacked the tame deer in the park at Tring. The brothers moreover needed somewhere to stay as their enthusiasm for the hunt grew still greater: it was not ideal to have to travel from London more than once a week, even if the trains were fast. Nathaniel wrote to his brothers in 1840:

Follow my advice, and do not let the opportunity slip of getting out [of stock] at fair prices so that when the season comes we may have a little hunting without sweating and bothering ourselves in the railway carriages.²²

Of great significance also are Nathaniel's thoughts in a letter of 1847 to his brothers in which he announced that he would like to

²⁰ RAL, RFam, 109/43, Lionel de Rothschild to Edmund Carrington and J. Gleinster, 1840; Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 122.

²¹ RAL, RFam, 109/56/28, J. S. Brown to Mayer Amschel de Rothschild, 26 January 1844.

²² RAL, XI/104/0, ink no. 76, pencil no. 279, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, (undated) 1840.

lay out in a profitable way £100,000 in Bucks. I'll promise you to let you hunt over my land without sending you a notice. We must all of us become Buckinghamshire squires.²³

The first Rothschild residences in the Vale of Aylesbury: Mentmore and Aston Clinton

Lionel was the first of the brothers to begin seriously contemplating the purchase of land in the area in the late 1830s. The death of their father in 1836 meant that the brothers now had the means as well as the inclination to begin purchasing land of their own. At this time land in the Vale of Aylesbury was of good quality and reasonably priced and a number of opportune events in the area resulted in multiple farms and estates being offered for sale.²⁴ Soon after 1836 Lionel made enquiries about Tring Manor itself from William Kay's executors (though declined to purchase it at this time).²⁵ His brothers continued his interest and looked over or made enquiries about a number of varied properties in the area in the 1840s.

But it was Mayer who made the first major step in the acquisition of land in the Vale. In September 1842 he purchased a small estate of several farms and cottages in the parishes of Mentmore and Wing, close to Tring Park, from a Mr Werner for £5,000, as well as some parcels of land at Ledburn in the Mentmore parish.²⁶ He added further small purchases of land to these areas throughout the 1840s.²⁷ The Rothschilds' hunt was moved to Mentmore in the 1843-44 season and the first public meet of the Rothschild hounds was in November 1845. It was from this initial purchase that the three brothers'

²³ RAL, XI/109/61/2/110, Nathaniel de Rothschild to brothers, Paris, (undated) 1847.

²⁴ For example the bankruptcy of the Duke of Buckingham, and the financial hardship of other landowners in the area forced many to sell land: Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 292.

²⁵ For example Lord Chesterfield's estate at Wing: Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 204.

²⁶ CBS, D94-26, Convenyance of a messuage lands and tithes at Ledburn in the County of Bucks, Mrs Eleanor Villiers to the Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild, 29 September 1842; CBS, Bucks D94-26, Covenant for production of deeds, Mrs Eleanor Villiers to the Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild, 16 September 1842; RAL, RFam, 109/52, Richard Dawes to Mayer de Rothschild, 15 October 1842; Hannah Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883).

²⁷ See for example CBS, D94-1; D94-6; D-94-8; D94-10; D94-11; D94-12; D94-18; D94-21; D94-24; D94-25; D94-26; D94-49, all of which contain deeds relating to the sale of land in the area to Mayer Amschel de Rothschild, between 1842 and 1851; See also HALS, Plans and references of the estate of the late James Field, 1843, the plan of which is marked with the lands of 'Barons Rothschild'.

estates in the Vale would take form. Soon though instead of merely land upon which to hunt it is evident they gained a taste for country life and looked to purchase property or landed estates. Thus began the enormous investment in land holdings in the Vale of Aylesbury by the Rothschilds that would continue for generations.

At Mentmore it was Mayer who decided to construct the first Rothschild residence in the Vale of Aylesbury in 1850. The Jacobethan-style Mentmore House was imposing and lavish, a flamboyant announcement of the English Rothschild family's entry into the Vale. He was joined in about 1851 by his brother Anthony, who took up residence with his family at Aston Clinton House just eight miles away, a house built in the classical Italianate style dating from about 1770-1790. The house soon became another luxurious Rothschild residence: the old eighteenth-century structure was not demolished, but on the whole retained, renovated, improved and extended to make it larger and more comfortable. Lionel's sons, Nathaniel Mayer de Rothschild (1840-1915), Alfred Charles de Rothschild (1842-1918), and Leopold de Rothschild (1845-1917), as well as their Austrian cousin Ferdinand James de Rothschild (1839-1898) would continue this acquisition of land and establishment of country mansions in the area in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Further Rothschild residences in the Vale of Aylesbury: Tring Park, Halton, Ascott and Waddesdon

After his father's death in 1879 Nathaniel's assumed the position as presiding partner of the Rothschild Bank. His brothers were much less involved in the affairs of New Court and Nathaniel became the head and driving force of the organisation. He was highly conservative and rose to become England's leading Jew, effectively the head of Anglo-Jewry: he became the president of the United Synagogue and in the course of his life played important roles in most key Jewish organizations (including the Great Synagogue, the Jews' Free School, and the Anglo-Jewish Association). Nathaniel served as MP for Aylesbury from 1865 and was appointed as Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire in 1889. He furthermore inherited his uncle's Baronetcy in 1876 and was elevated to the peerage in 1885, the first British Jew to be awarded such a position. Nathaniel's time at Cambridge

had been beneficial; here he was admitted into the intimate circle of the Prince of Wales, a connection which he maintained throughout his life.

Nathaniel was presented with the Tring Park estate by his father just after he purchased it in 1872. The late-seventeenth-century Tring Park House, which lay on the estate, was renovated and extended to become a sizeable country residence for Nathaniel and his family. In the 1870s and 80s the house (which had possibly been built by Sir Christopher Wren) underwent a major programme of restoration and rebuilding in order to be modernised and extended. Fashionable French eighteenth-century-style red brick and stone dressings were added to its exterior, and a slate mansard roof was installed. By the 1890s the older structure was almost entirely obscured and the exterior took on the character of a *dix-huitième* French château. Due to his commitments at New Court Nathaniel rarely stayed at his country house in the Vale of Aylesbury for more than a weekend, but when there he enjoyed the company of his family and took a keen interest in agricultural activities: his estate became a centre for scientific farming.²⁸ The tenanted estate was also devotedly cared for and renovated; Nathaniel developed 'an elaborate system of paternalistic welfare services for the community'.²⁹

²⁸ Victor Gray and Melanie Aspey, 'Rothschild, Nathaniel Mayer de, first Baron Rothschild (1840–1915)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 10: Nathaniel Mayer and Alfred Charles de Rothschild, by Camille Silvy, 1861
(National Portrait Gallery)



Figure 11: Nathaniel Mayer de Rothschild, 1st Baron Rothschild, c.1900



Figure 12: Alfred Charles de Rothschild, c.1910

Though being one of the three managing partners at the bank, Alfred was more interested in external pursuits and less in the operations of the bank. He never became an MP but was actively interested in British foreign affairs and closely acquainted with many of the leading political figures of the day. Alfred also retained a competent understanding of financial matters and was appointed as the first Jewish Director of the Bank of England in 1869. Perhaps though Alfred is remembered best for his expenditure on his lavish residences and art collections, and the luxury, plutocratic entertainments he provided. In addition he became a trustee of the National Gallery, and a founder trustee of the Wallace Collection. Alfred inherited the Halton estate upon his father's death in 1879 and determined upon building a magnificent and luxurious new mansion here in the style of a French Renaissance château, a style closely associated with the nineteenth-century *nouveaux riches*. It was completed in just three years: from 1880 to 1883.

Leopold was perhaps the most popular of the brothers, and whilst he was involved in politics and the Jewish community, his major interest was horseracing: he was a highly successful breeder of racehorses and was elected to the Jockey Club in 1891. He maintained a high public profile as a result of his success in this field. Leopold also became president of the United Synagogue and of the Jews' Free School. In the Vale of Aylesbury he inherited the Ascott estate from his father in 1879 and with it the

seventeenth-century cottage-style Ascott House. The house was enlarged (retaining the original farmhouse at its core) to become a much larger family residence and fashionable hunting lodge in the Old English or Jacobean style.



Figure 13: Leopold de Rothschild, by Camille Silvy, 1860 (National Portrait Gallery)



Figure 14: Leopold de Rothschild, c.1910

Lionel's involvement in his sons' future must be acknowledged. It is evident from an early stage that the land he acquired in the Vale of Aylesbury was intended not for his own use but for that of his sons. Tring Park was presented to his eldest son Nathaniel perhaps as a belated wedding gift upon its purchase in 1872, the Halton estate was not utilised by Lionel when he purchased it in 1853 but instead given to his second eldest son after his death, and finally at Ascott the first Rothschild inhabitant was his youngest son Leopold after 1874 (who also inherited Gunnersbury Park). By his death Lionel had secured separate estates for each of his sons, enabling them all to establish mansion houses within country estates by the 1880s. Lionel wanted his sons to become land owners and intended that they join the ranks of landed gentry. He recognised that the ownership of land could aid in the assumption of further social and political success. Such a scheme was not uncommon amongst the nineteenth-century *nouveaux riches*. Caroline Dakers has shown that the purchase of land by James Morrison (1789-1857) in the last decade of his life was also not intended for his own benefit but grew from a desire to 'give each of his sons their own self-contained estate'.³⁰



Figure 15: Ferdinand James de Rothschild, c. 1890s

³⁰ Caroline Dakers, *A Genius for Money: business, art and the Morrisons* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 196.

Lionel's three sons were soon joined in the Vale of Aylesbury by their Austrian cousin Ferdinand at his estate of Waddesdon. Here he built an impressive and sumptuous Renaissance château-style mansion. Ferdinand was accompanied by his sister Alice, who built the final nineteenth-century Rothschild residence in the Vale, Eythrope Pavilion. Nathaniel, Alfred, Leopold, Ferdinand and Alice lived alongside Mayer's daughter Hannah (1851-1890, Countess of Rosebery from 1878) at Mentmore, and Anthony's daughters, Constance (1843-1931, Lady Battersea from 1877) and Annie (1844-1926, the Hon. Mrs Eliot Yorke from 1873), at Aston Clinton. Thus a Rothschild community in the Vale of Aylesbury was firmly establish.



Figure 16: Alice Charlotte von Rothschild, c.1870s



Figure 17: Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery, c. 1860s-70s



Figure 18: Constance, Lady Battersea, by Cyril Flower, 1st Baron Battersea, early 1890s
(National Portrait Gallery)



Figure 19: Annie Yorke, by Cyril Flower, 1st Baron Battersea, early 1890s (National Portrait Gallery)

By the end of their lives, and to the benefit of the next generation, Lionel, Anthony and Mayer de Rothschild came to enjoy a position and influence in Britain greater than that their father had established. This was an influence that no longer solely relied upon their significant financial strength: Lionel and his brothers had embarked upon and succeeded in a project to gain membership of the landed classes in Britain. They had built on their father's achievements and cultivated their political and social standing as English gentlemen through the estates, mansions and packs of hounds that they had begun to establish in the Vale of Aylesbury. By the end of the nineteenth century the family had accumulated over 30,000 acres in the Vale; they became well-known landowners, and owned no less than seven mansions in the vicinity within 15 miles of each another (namely Mentmore House, Aston Clinton House, Tring Park House, Halton House, Ascott House, Waddesdon Manor and Eythrope Pavilion). They also served as High Sheriffs or Lord Lieutenants for the locality, established a succession of local MPs, and gained a peerage (as well as being allied in marriage with two others).

The move by the Rothschild family into the Vale of Aylesbury was gradual and happened over a number of decades, with more and more individuals moving to the area as the

century progressed. The reasons why each member of the family did so varied and each individual revealed different priorities in their actions. Thus caution must be applied in generalising about the reasons for the family's move to the Vale and construction of mansion houses. The following chapter will examine the family's reasons for establishing estates and mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury in more detail, and will uncover more about their choices and actions in this.



Figure 20: Map of London and the Home Counties (C. Smith, *New Map of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1806)

Chapter Two

The English Rothschild family and life in the Vale of Aylesbury

The English Rothschild family's acquisition of land and construction of country houses in the English countryside was driven by multiple motivating factors. The reasons why Lionel, his brothers and his sons did not establish further houses nearer to the west of London and the existing Rothschild Gunnersbury estate in the 1840s and 50s, but instead chose Buckinghamshire will be determined in this chapter.

Leisure

As noted Lionel, Mayer and Anthony were motivated by their love of hunting and countryside living in their decision to establish country residences in the Vale: in fact the earliest contact the family had with the Vale of Aylesbury was as a result of their leisure activities. Away from London the brothers and their families could indulge in such activities and the Vale offered excellent opportunities for exercise and sport. Their mother Hannah de Rothschild is often credited with encouraging her sons in their taste for hunting, as she encouraged them in all aristocratic pursuits. Constance, Lady Battersea, remarked in her *Reminiscences* that her grandmother 'felt that her sons could not get enough healthy exercise whilst leading their busy city life, so she strongly advocated their owning some land in the country and hunting during the winter months'.¹ The brothers were convinced hunting was good for their health, and remained ardent huntsmen until late in their lives. Stag hunting was favoured by the brothers because by its nature it suited the City banker, who only had a limited time for leisure and wanted to make the most of a trip to the country.

Participation in hunting also had certain social benefits: despite the increasing number of men participating in hunting in the second-half of the nineteenth century the sport was still considered an aristocratic activity.² Although hunting was technically open to all, the claim by many that anyone could participate must be approached with scepticism: a pack composed of fashionable sporting gentlemen would rarely contain a humble farmer or

¹ Battersea, *Reminiscences*, p. 27.

² Emma Griffin, *Blood Sport: hunting in Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 168.

tradesman in its midst. Subscriptions, dress codes and the custom of accepting new members only by invitation all helped to ensure each pack maintained a unique social character. Ireland writes that in the nineteenth century 'sporting interest could bolster status'.³

Mayer and Mentmore

Mayer's acquisitions of land evidently had in mind his wish to acquire a permanent base for he and his brothers to hunt from: by 1843-44 the Rothschilds' hunt had been relocated to Mentmore and at some point in the 1840s Mayer took over a cottage by the church in Mentmore Village for himself, so that he would have somewhere to stay when he came to hunt.⁴

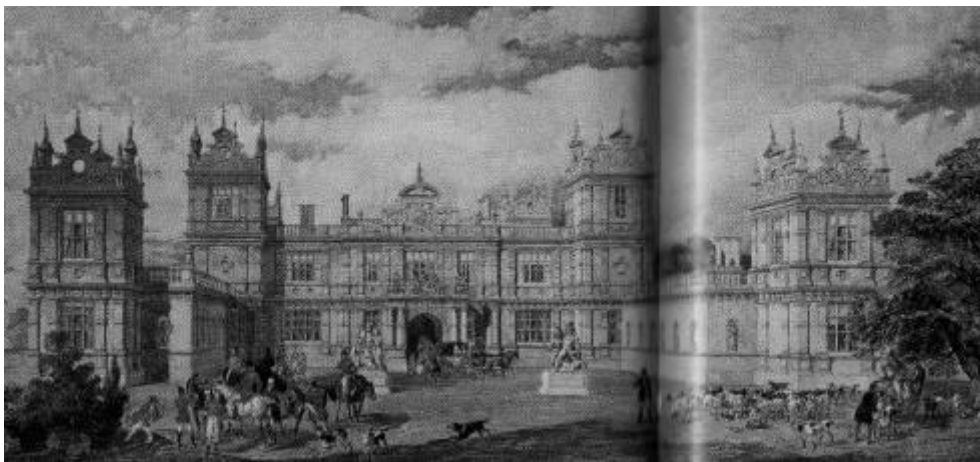


Figure 22: The Entrance Front of Mentmore Towers (with preparations underway for a day's hunting), c.1855

Anthony and Aston Clinton

The Aston Clinton estate provided the perfect location from which Anthony could pursue a part-time life in the countryside. He took to his rural life in the Vale of Aylesbury with ease and enjoyed the role of local landowner. He spent a great deal of the last ten years of his life there away from London, 'leading the life of a country gentleman'. His daughter Constance (1843-1931) remarked that he had plenty of time for the 'enjoyments that his

³ Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 305.

⁴ Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 204; Robert Gibbs, *Buckinghamshire; a record of local occurrences*, 5 vols (1882), IV, pp. 3-85.

love of social life and his country pursuits brought him'.⁵ He was remembered by *The Morning Post* as a 'steady man of business and a quiet country gentleman'.⁶

Nathaniel and Tring Park

The Tring Park estate lay just two miles from Tring station which, from 1838, made London and the City accessible by train. A description of the Tring Park grounds and estate produced when it was advertised for sale in 1872 certainly would have appealed to the family's enjoyment of hunting and shooting. The Rothschilds' hunting meets were even mentioned in the sales brochure:

The Sporting is of an unusually attractive character, affording capital Partridge and Hare Shooting, with numerous well-stocked Coverts, excellent well-preserved Fishing and Fowling in the extensive Reservoirs of the Grand Junction Canal Company, and the right of Free Warren and Free Chase over the whole Manor, comprising upwards of 8000 Acres. The district is Hunted by the "O.B.H" and Mr Leigh's Hounds and the Meets of Baron Rothschild's Stag Hounds are within easy distance.⁷

The purchase of the estate when the opportunity arose therefore seems logical in light of their enjoyment of hunting in the area and long-standing familiarity with the estate.

Leopold and Ascott

When Leopold first inhabited Ascott House he was not yet 30 and still unmarried: he intended to use the house at this time as an informal hunting lodge and rural retreat. Prior to this Leopold had been a frequent visitor to his uncle's estate at Mentmore where he participated enthusiastically in hunting and shooting. He was already therefore familiar with the benefits of the Ascott estate in this respect and this was perhaps the greatest factor influencing his decision to begin residing here. Some decades later Anthony's daughter Constance remarked that Leopold had 'very pronounced county tastes, and these, added to sporting proclivities, made him select Ascott and Newmarket as his favourite

⁵ Battersea, *Reminiscences*, p. 9; Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 344.

⁶ 'Death of Sir Anthony Rothschild, Bart.', *The Morning Post*, Wednesday 5 January 1876, p. 5, Issue 32299.

⁷ CBS, DX258/13, Particulars and conditions of sale, Tring Park Estate, 7 May 1872.

residences'.⁸ Even when he inherited the large Gunnersbury Park estate and house in 1879 Leopold continued to return to Ascott for the hunting season. Leopold, his wife and their three sons, would generally spend the winter season there (from November to May), hunting, shooting and riding on most days.⁹



Figure 23: Ascott House, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1889 (NMRC)

Individual circumstances of family members

The Rothschild family undoubtedly acquired country houses away from London as they wished for residences where they could enjoy leisure time away from demanding business and the dust and noise of the City. It is clear the family simply enjoyed country living for its own sake, and took pleasure in the privacy and opportunity to indulge in private family life. Jill Allibone notes a certain clannishness within the family in all settling so close together: their properties were close enough to maintain daily contact.¹⁰ The brothers were all immensely rich by the mid-nineteenth century, which set them apart from their neighbours; they were also still a strongly Jewish family in a time when prejudice was still present. The decision to settle so close together in the Vale (indeed also in London) may therefore have reflected their desire to socialise with each other. Considering the unique social position of the family this 'clannishness' is not unexpected.¹¹

⁸ Constance, Lady Battersea, *Lady de Rothschild, extracts from her notebooks* (London: Arthur L. Huphreys, 1912), p. 45

⁹ *Ascott, Buckinghamshire*, ed. by John M Robinson (London, Sala Publishers, 2008), p. 10.

¹⁰ Jill Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', *Country Life*, 183 (February 1989). 80-83.

¹¹ Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', 80-83.

Much correspondence exists to show that family members visited each other frequently whilst in the Vale and took pleasure in one another's company. They enjoyed hunting on each other's lands and were attentive in dinner or party engagements. Indeed, if no one else called on them, they could call on each other. A journal of 1885 noted that 'All of that great house who were resident in England...settled in or near the Vale of Aylesbury, and within or on the confines of Buckinghamshire.' The writer suggested this arrangement had much to do with the family members' regard for one another adding that 'faithful cohesion among kindred implies that they possess virtues of no common order'.¹² In 1907 Thomas Escott, editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, also wrote of the family's presence in the Vale; his words however took a very different tone, noting the 'Israelitish annexation of Buckinghamshire', a statement quite likely to have been influenced by anti-Semitic feelings.¹³ A great deal of evidence highlights the family members' wish to live near one another, and took pleasure in this closeness. In just two days in January 1867 for example, Mayer de Rothschild's daughter Hannah visited both Ascott House and Halton House, and spent time at her own home of Mentmore House with her cousins from Aston Clinton.¹⁴ Such a pattern was repeated throughout the year. At the opening of the Halton Industrial Exhibition of 1868 no less than 11 English Rothschild family members were present, led by Anthony de Rothschild.¹⁵ Such sociability was not exceptional and the family members visited each other's residences for balls, dinner parties, garden parties and informal gatherings on a daily basis when in the Vale.¹⁶ Such an arrangement was repeated in London where each family member owned a town house within calling distance of the others: Lionel at 148 Piccadilly, Mayer at 107 Piccadilly with Ferdinand at 143 and his sister Alice at 142. Just around the corner at 19 Grosvenor Gate Anthony acquired a residence, Leopold was just off Piccadilly at 5 Hamilton Place and Alfred similarly nearby at 1 Seamore Place.

It was largely the pursuit of leisure activities such as hunting and shooting which led Lionel and his brothers to seek land and estates further from London. Yet it was not only the male members of the family who drove this choice: Lionel's wife Charlotte (1819-1884) and

¹² H.E., 'Tring Park', *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 11 July 1885, p. 24.

¹³ T.H.S. Escott, *Society in the Country House* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1907), pp. 472-3.

¹⁴ Dalmeny House Archive, Diaries of Hannah, Countess of Rosebery, 1862-1867.

¹⁵ 'The Halton Industrial Exhibition', *The Times*, 2 June 1868, p. 9.

¹⁶ As revealed in much correspondence between family members, including for example RAL, RFamC/5/18; RFamC/5/21; RFamC/5/23-24; RFamC/5/30; RFamC/14; RFamC/21; 000/297/4.

Anthony's wife Louisa (1821-1910) were eager to establish country residences where they could manage their own households and spend time away from their mother-in-law who resided at Gunnersbury. In 1847 Louisa wrote of a visit to Gunnersbury in her journal:

We came here last night. I felt my usual chill creep over me when we advanced through the stately carriage drive to the stately mansion and were received in a rather stately manner by aunt [Hannah].¹⁷

A more specific consideration in this area may have also played a part in bringing the Rothschilds to the Vale – it is possible that Benjamin Disraeli encouraged the family members to establish themselves as his neighbours in the area. The Rothschilds' friendship with Disraeli and his wife had begun in earnest during the 1840s. Their common cultural origins may have encouraged a friendship (Disraeli was of Jewish descent but had converted to Christianity in his childhood) and Disraeli shared the Rothschilds' love of hunting. His father's home was Bradenham Manor, Buckinghamshire and it is possible he had been riding with the Royal Hunt in the area in the 1830s and 40s as the Rothschilds probably had also.¹⁸ Disraeli and his wife were regular recipients of the Rothschilds' hospitality and he regarded them as being among his intimate companions.¹⁹

Like the Rothschilds, Disraeli was not of native British aristocratic lineage and would also buy his way into county society, acquiring the estate and house at Hughenden, Buckinghamshire, in 1847.²⁰ By the time of his death, Disraeli had managed to double his landowning in Buckinghamshire and he clearly enjoyed playing the country squire, once remarking to Lord Rosebery that: 'Nothing could equal the egotism of a landed proprietor on a Sunday afternoon'.²¹

The fact that that the Rothschilds and Disraeli were simultaneously contemplating the purchase of estates in the same county, and within reasonable distance of one another, should not be overlooked. Both families, with a shared ethnicity and still considered somewhat as foreign interlopers, benefitted from each other's company as neighbours.

¹⁷ RAL, 000/297, Louisa de Rothschild's Journal, 29 October 1847.

¹⁸ Kessler, *The Rothschilds and Disraeli*, p. 13.

¹⁹ Cowles, *The Rothschilds: a Family of Fortune*, p. 94.

²⁰ With the help of Lord George Bentinck and his brothers, who lent him two-thirds of the purchase price.

²¹ Joseph Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riche: Style and Status in Victorian and Edwardian Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1999), p. 215; W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1929), II, p. 76.

The proximity of the estates they settled in must have been of comfort to all concerned: it is only 14 miles from Hughenden to Aston Clinton.

Mayer and Mentmore

It may have been easier for Mayer to undertake an expansion into the Vale than his brothers. As the youngest, Mayer was somewhat freer than his brothers to establish a residence away from London; this had much to do with the fact that he played a less major role in the running of the bank. His absences from London were accepted by his brothers who saw involvement in the Vale as a benefit to the family and their political and social ambitions there.

In addition Mayer genuinely enjoyed country life and enthusiastically wanted to invest his time, energy and money in land, farming and stockbreeding: he took to country living with such enthusiasm that his brothers began to call him 'Squire'. Mayer was also rich, and when he purchased the 700 acre Mentmore estate still only in his early 30s he therefore had the time, resources and opportunity to consider building a large residence.

It may also be that Mayer had purchased the Mentmore estate with the aim of building a new and impressive residence in mind. He was making a definite statement about his, and his family's, entrance into the Vale and his ability to build a large new property. Mentmore was a magnificent statement of opulence and country living, built on an 'eminence which commands a fine view of the Vale of Aylesbury, the Dunstable downs and the Chiltern and Barnham hills'.²² The structure was large and impressive; it asserted the Rothschild family's position and was a clear demonstration of their wealth.²³ Michael Hall is correct in concluding that the house was 'an assertion of status'.²⁴ The house set a benchmark for the wider Rothschild family also, making a statement about the success of the English Rothschild branch. Mayer's motives are further revealed when we consider his eagerness for the house to be built quickly: the contract of 24 October 1851 shows that by this date Mayer had already chosen the site for his house and had engaged Paxton to compose the

²² 'Mentmore', *The Builder*, XV (1857), 738-40.

²³ R. O. A. Crewe-Milnes, *Lord Rosebery*, 2 vols (1931), II, p. 51.

²⁴ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 35.

plans.²⁵ In the contract for construction the builder (George Myers) also bound himself to completing the house in less than 18 months; otherwise a penalty would be applied for every additional day.²⁶ At Mentmore Mayer showed he could employ new ideas and a leading modern architect in his mansion, and had the resources to commission the latest techniques of building and design.



Figure 24: East or Entrance Front, by A. Newton, late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century (NMRC)



Figure 25: East Entrance Hall from north-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

²⁵ RAL, 000/848/16, The Baron M. A. Rothschild and Mr G.E.O. Myers. Copy contract for the erection of a mansion at Mentmore. Joseph Paxton Esq. 24 Oct 1851.

²⁶ The work however did not begin until the end of 1852, and building was not completed on the required day in July 1853. Yet the penalty clause was not implemented, and no fine enforced. For what reasons the building work was delayed and why the penalty was not invoked are a mystery.



Figure 26: View of exterior c.1900 (NMRC)

It is likely that Mayer had been hoping to purchase the Mentmore estate ever since he had begun to acquire land around it in the early 1840s. The estate had been valued by his agent as early as 1843.²⁷ A plan attached to the conveyance in 1850 shows that when he acquired the Mentmore estate Mayer already owned most of the land adjoining it.²⁸

Mayer's marriage to Juliana Cohen in 1850 may have provided further impetus for him to consider purchasing a large area of land with the intention to establish his own estate and residence in the Vale.²⁹ In this he may have had his future family in mind: Mayer's daughter, Hannah (1851-1890), laid the foundation stone for the new house aged just six months on 31st December 1851. Thus Mentmore House was also built as a home, as a residence for use by Mayer and for his wife to enjoy and escape the pressures of London life: it was evidently much liked by Mayer and his family, and used for extended periods. Mayer, his wife and daughter, consistently spent prolonged periods of the year in residence, usually coinciding with the autumn-winter hunting and shooting season.³⁰

Mayer also spent less time abroad than his brothers: in 1849 after he had not attended a family gathering in Paris his cousin Alphonse de Rothschild (1827-1905) wrote to him: 'but

²⁷ Legal difficulties meant the estate was only offered for sale in 1850: it had been in Chancery, and an Act of Parliament creating a power of sale had to be obtained before the purchase could be effected; Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 204; The estate had been valued for him 'as an investment' at £12,250, see Dalmeny House Archive, Rosebery Papers, C. P. Beurdeley to Mayer de Rothschild, Piazza Hotel Covent Garden, 21 June 1843.

²⁸ CBS, D94-6, Conveyance of the Manor and Advowson of Mentmore in the County of Bucks and of Certain Lands in that Parish, William Henry Frederick Cavendish Esq. to the Baron Mayer de Rothschild, 26 November 1850; CBS, D/RO/1-176, Mentmore Estate Office.

²⁹ Chadwick, *The Works of Sir Joseph Paxton*, p. 188.

³⁰ These conclusions arise from observations made from entries in the Mentmore House Guest Books (1871-1877) now at the Dalmeny House Archive.

you are such a staunch Englishman that you do not like to leave Old England'.³¹ Mayer settled seamlessly and rapidly into country life. At Mentmore he lived in much grandeur, surrounded by and making full use of his estate to pursue the activities expected of an English country gentleman. His time was occupied with his hounds in their kennels, his racehorses in a growing hunting stud, his deer paddocks and his herd of pedigree Jersey cows.

The diaries of Mayer's daughter Hannah of the 1860s reveal how the family lived at Mentmore. Her entries record her frequent social visits to her relations at nearby estates, as well as the return visits they paid her; hunting and parties also engaged her time. It is also clear that Mentmore was close enough to London so that the family could travel there regularly: Mayer often travelled by train from Mentmore to London in order to attend to business; though how frequently he did this is unclear.³² Hannah also took the train into London perhaps twice or three times a month for various social visits and entertainment, spending one or two nights at the family's London residence in Piccadilly before returning to Mentmore.³³

Anthony and Aston Clinton

Aston Clinton House became a country home which Anthony, Louisa and their two daughters, 'loved dearly'.³⁴ Louisa particularly saw the benefits of country living, writing in May 1852 that living at Aston Clinton 'would however be a very good thing for the children'.³⁵ A year later she continued to contemplate the benefits of country living and Aston Clinton House:

³¹ RAL, XI/109/73/4, Anthony de Rothschild, Paris, to Mayer de Rothschild (with a p.s. from Alphonse de Rothschild), no date (Oct-Dec 1849).

³² Certainly this was the case in 1849 when Lionel de Rothschild travelled to the Continent and Mayer de Rothschild deputised at New Court for four months. There is evidence Mayer and his brothers and nephews invested in railway season tickets, implying they travelled relatively frequently between Buckinghamshire and the City of London: See RAL, XII/41/6/1/68, Mr Brooks of the London and North Western Railway to Mayer de Rothschild, letter regarding the enclosure of two season tickets at £30, 1 April 1865; RAL, XII/41/5/2/138, Mr Dettman of the London and North Western Railway to Mayer de Rothschild, letter acknowledging the receipt of two cheques each for £10 for payments due on tickets for Baron Mayer de Rothschild and Mr. N. de Rothschild, 6 October 1863. Whilst these (and three other receipts for special trains) exist at the Rothschild Archives there is no way of ascertaining when exactly Mayer travelled to and from Mentmore, and how long he spent at Mentmore House.

³³ Dalmeny House Archive, Diaries of Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery, 1862-1867.

³⁴ William J. Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', *The Woman at Home*, CCXXX (1912), 103-107.

³⁵ RAL, 000/297, Selections from the Journals of Lady de Rothschild by Lucy Cohen (1920), 18 May 1852.

but the country about seemed to me prettier than it had hitherto done and the air and quiet around did me good...The tranquillity of the country is pleasant to me and I feel that in time I may grow attached to this little place.³⁶

Aston Clinton was ideally placed so as to enable Anthony and his family to maintain close contact with his brother at Mentmore (which lay just seven miles away).

Nathaniel and Tring Park

In the early 1870s Nathaniel's wife Emma wrote to her mother-in-law Charlotte thanking her and Lionel for the purchase of the estate. Emma declared that she admired 'this beautiful house and its perfect arrangements' and that she could not believe she was to live in it.³⁷ The estate was the perfect country home for Lionel's eldest son and his young family: with its situation close to Tring station Nathaniel could enjoy leisure time in the countryside with his relatives and still maintain his responsibilities as the leading third generation member of the English Rothschild bank.

Alfred and Halton

When Lionel purchased the Halton estate in 1849 an existing modest Palladian-style manor house or 'squire's home' stood in the village of Halton.³⁸ Yet as no member of the Rothschild family took up residence on the estate until the 1880s this house was left vacant, slowly decayed, and was allowed to become derelict, demolished by 1879.³⁹ When Alfred inherited the estate in 1879 it therefore lacked a dwelling of any significant size. If Alfred wished to live on his new estate he realised a new residence would be required and promptly took the opportunity to build a grand mansion.

³⁶ RAL, 000/297, Selections from the Journals of Lady de Rothschild by Lucy Cohen (1920), 15 May 1853; RAL, 000/297, Selections from the Journals of Lady de Rothschild by Lucy Cohen (1920), 23 August 1853.

³⁷ RAL, RFamC/14/57, Emma de Rothschild at Tring Park to Charlotte de Rothschild, no date early-1870s.

³⁸ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*



Figure 27: Halton House, South or Entrance Front, J. Thompson, 1880s (NMRC)

The land Alfred inherited at Halton was not the first in his possession in the Vale of Aylesbury: surviving deeds indicate that in 1864 at the age of 22 he already owned land in the parishes of Drayton Beauchamp and Tring.⁴⁰ The Halton estate left to him by his father however was rather more substantial than these minor isolated landholdings. This provided the opportunity for Alfred to create a new country residence and express his personality through it. In addition his personal wealth afforded him the means to build a large and sumptuous home for himself (which he did, not only at Halton but also at Seamore Place, London, from 1876).

The fact that Alfred remained a bachelor throughout his life must also be highlighted here: because of his position Alfred had few personal ties and could devote much time and effort to such a project. In addition he was part of the third generation of English Rothschilds for whom work at the family bank was becoming increasingly less vital: Alfred had already inherited a large fortune, and was not required to take as leading a part in running the business as his elder brother. Furthermore as a younger brother with financial independence, and with less pressure to adhere rigorously to social norms or familial responsibilities, Alfred was far more at liberty to follow his own wishes than his elder brother was.

The house was constructed with remarkable speed. This again reflected Alfred's particular circumstances, and also his enthusiasm for the project. *Country Life* of 1897 was impressed with the pace of construction and impact of the new house:

⁴⁰ RAL, 000/52/1 and 000/53/6, Admissions and surrenders A. C. de Rothschild, 1864.

When we reflect but that a few years ago that beautiful sweep of country which lies on the slope of the Halton hills...was worked by the plough, or given up only to the feeding of cattle, we cannot be but overcome with surprise that so magnificent a house should have risen on the spot.⁴¹

In addition to his particular circumstances, the construction of Halton House owed much to Alfred's character. He was a well-known society figure, belonged to the fashionable Marlborough House set, and was a member of most of the respected gentleman's clubs of the day. He had also begun a friendship with Albert, Prince of Wales at Cambridge, which continued throughout his life. *Vanity Fair* of 1884 remarked that it was Alfred's

function to represent the great house [the Rothschild family] in Society, and he does it with much thoroughness. He it is who receives the Princes, interviews the ambassadors, and gives the splendid entertainments to which the chosen smart people of London delight to resort. On these occasions he makes himself the slave and servant of his guests, lavishes upon them all the luxuries that wealth can supply, and sends them away always grateful, if sometimes envious. He knows and is known by everybody in London: he is a Director of the Bank of England, a shrewd critic, yet amiable, generous, and cheery; he is very rich; and he is a bachelor.⁴²

Alfred was elegant, knowledgeable and socially able. He was reportedly a 'flamboyant dandy whose sumptuous taste impressed and amused'.⁴³ He liked nothing more than to entertain and exhibit his good taste and wealth with great splendour. This flamboyance was evident in his new mansion house. It was constructed with great speed (taking only three years from 1880), was intended primarily as an entertainment venue, and was undoubtedly ostentatious in its architectural style. Alfred wished the exterior and interior of his new house to express overtly his showiness: it was a carefully managed exercise in conspicuous consumption. Externally for example the mansion proclaimed Alfred's Rothschild identity in a decorative frieze which encircled the entire structure and featured

⁴¹ 'Country Homes: Halton', *Country Life Illustrated*, I (1897), 664-666.

⁴² Jehu Junior 'Men of the Day - No CCVI, Mr Alfred de Rothschild', *Vanity Fair*, 31 May 1884.

⁴³ Jonathan Conlin, 'Butlers and boardrooms: Alfred de Rothschild as collector and connoisseur', *Rothschild Archive Review of the Year*, (2005-2006), pp.26-33.

various Rothschild symbols, including the five arrows, Lion of Hesse, an Imperial Austrian Eagle, a silver unicorn, buffalo horns encircling a pointed star, and the three Imperial ostrich feathers. Carved under some of the symbols was the Rothschild family motto 'Concordia Integritas Industria' and Alfred's own monogram. The exterior walls were also elaborately decorated with carvings of fruit, flowers and female heads, the maidens of the four seasons and angels of sun and moon. Much interior decoration also prominently featured Alfred's monogram; this proclamation of ownership is reminiscent of Louis XV's employment of his own initial in his Cabinet Intérieur at Versailles.⁴⁴ Inside the house Alfred continued in his use of the five arrows motif, occasionally reverting to just three arrows.⁴⁵ All of these symbolic details affirmed and displayed Alfred's confidence, and that of his family in this period. Alfred's sexuality may also have been a contributing factor to his decision to build a large and flamboyant country residence primarily intended for entertainment: Alfred was suspected by his contemporaries as being homosexual, a fact frequently reflected in his personality, his lavish hospitality, conspicuous consumption, and extravagant tastes in architecture, interior decoration and collecting.

A further motive for the construction of Halton House was Alfred's relationship with his cousin Ferdinand. As noted Alfred perhaps intended to compete with Ferdinand, who had begun his mansion at Waddesdon in 1874.⁴⁶ Like most Rothschild family members, Alfred and Ferdinand, whilst close friends, maintained an element of rivalry in their endeavours, particularly in entertaining and collecting. Alfred's project at Halton may have been motivated by his wish to outdo his cousin: Halton House was, after all, begun later but finished earlier than Waddesdon Manor.

Ferdinand and Waddesdon

Ferdinand spent his childhood and adolescence travelling between Vienna, Frankfurt and his relatives in France and England. His mother Charlotte retained a love of her childhood home of Gunnersbury Park and often spent the summer months there with Ferdinand and his siblings. Ferdinand relished the time he spent with his English cousins and in the

⁴⁴ Barbara Lasic, 'A Display of Opulence: Alfred de Rothschild and the Visual Recording of Halton House', *Furniture History*, 40 (2004), 135-150.

⁴⁵ Perhaps as a compliment to himself, as he was one of the three brothers of that generation of the family in England.

⁴⁶ Waddesdon's construction had begun in 1874: Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', 80-83.

1860s decided to live permanently in England. Following the death of his English wife, Ferdinand threw himself into country life with his uncles and cousins in the Vale of Aylesbury, joining them in hunting and increasing his fondness for the area. Ferdinand settled easily into his new life and so it was natural that he began to think of establishing a permanent residence of his own there.

Ferdinand found his opportunity in 1876 when upon his father's death in 1874 he settled upon using his inheritance (and money which he gained from selling his shares in the Viennese Rothschild bank) to establish a residence. Fortunately in that same year the Waddesdon and Winchendon estates, owned by the Duke of Marlborough and totalling 2,700 acres, came on to the market. As a result of his hunting activities in the area Ferdinand already knew of the farming estate of Waddesdon with its 'bracing and salubrious air, pleasant scenery, excellent hunting.'⁴⁷ The estate was conveniently situated within 15 miles of the estates of his uncles and cousins. According to William Lacey in 1912 there had been 'scope and opportunity to make of the inviting situation exactly what the purchaser pleased' and as the estate did not have an existing house Ferdinand subsequently dedicated the next 10 years to constructing a residence for himself here.⁴⁸

Travel to and from business in the City

A reason why the Vale of Aylesbury appealed so much to the Rothschild family was the fact that by the 1830s the county was easily accessible from the City. By 1838 it boasted a rapid rail link to London, which permitted a journey to Euston in just an hour and a half. The Vale of Aylesbury benefitted in the early days of railway building by its geographical position – lying across the proposed vertical routes connecting big midland cities with London. It was an area in demand for laying transport links.

In 1838 the London and Birmingham Railway (later the London and North Western Railway) began journeys on a new route it had constructed which stretched from Birmingham to Bletchley and Tring, following the course of the Grand Junction Canal. It was one of the first railways in the country, and in particular the first trunk railway to the

⁴⁷ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 54 and acc. 938, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book*, 1897.

⁴⁸ Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', 103-107.

capital; a fast train could take 3 hours from London to Birmingham over the 105 mile track. The line stopped at Leighton Buzzard, Cheddington and Tring by April 1838.⁴⁹ Tring station was less than two miles from Tring Park and around five miles from each of the Rothschild estates of Mentmore, Halton and Aston Clinton. Other railway companies entered the area soon after this and Buckinghamshire was enmeshed in the new transport infrastructure of the nineteenth century with numerous private companies offering more services and faster trains into the capital.⁵⁰ This must have been of great benefit to the Rothschild family, the brothers often combining a leisurely morning's hunting with an active business life, finding they could easily get to work in the City in good time. The timetable below shows that in 1839 it was possible to travel to Euston from Tring in just 1 hour 30 minutes.

Leighton Buzzard (then Cheddington)	7.20	9.35	13.35	16.50	18.45	20.35
Tring	7.45	10.00	16.00	17.30	19.10	21.00
Euston	9.15	11.30	17.30	18.45	20.30	22.30

Euston	6.00	8.00	11.00	14.00	17.00	19.00
Tring	7.25	9.35	12.25	15.35	18.35	20.25
Leighton Buzzard	-	10.00	12.50	16.00	19.00	-

Table 1: Timetable for the London and Birmingham Railway, Leighton Buzzard to London Euston, On and After Thursday 20 June 1839 [Bill Simpson, *The Aylesbury Railway: The First Branch Line, Cheddington to Aylesbury* (Oxford Publishing Co., 1989)]

Investment

It is likely that the purchase of land in the Vale of Aylesbury by the Rothschild brothers was in part motivated by economic considerations. David Cannadine asserts of Lionel and his

⁴⁹ E.J.S. Gadsden, *The Aylesbury Railway* (Buckinghamshire: Bledlow Press, 1962).

⁵⁰ *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History: from 1603 to the 1990s*, ed. by Jack Simmons and Gordon Biddle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

brothers: 'When they bought land in Buckinghamshire, it was a rational investment at a time of low prices and low interest rates, and because they wished to diversify their assets.'⁵¹ The economy of the day certainly played into the family's hands: they were assisted in their acquisitions by two periods of agricultural depression. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had begun a period of agricultural decline and by the 1850s the break-up of large estates in the Vale of Aylesbury was underway. The 1870s saw further agricultural decline owing to several disastrous harvests and competition from American prairie wheat and beef imported from South America, New Zealand and Australia by new refrigerated steamships. It may well have been the reduced price of land following these disasters which encouraged Lionel and Mayer to make further purchases.

Certain great landowners were forced to sell their vast land holdings in the Vale of Aylesbury at low prices as a result of the agricultural problems, which was an opportunity not to be missed. Particular events in the country of Buckinghamshire made it easier to purchase land there than elsewhere and Rothschild family members were helped in their acquisitions by the financial difficulties of two great Buckinghamshire families. The Dukes of Buckingham had for years been overreaching: they had bought too much land, borrowed too much money, and spent too much on their lavish homes. Disaster struck in the 1840s and the 2nd Duke (1797-1861) was forced to sell large tracts of his land, eventually parting with 40,000 acres of his 50,000 acre holdings in the area. In addition Sir George Dashwood, 5th Baronet (1790-1862), suffering from severe debts of his own and those of his father, was eager to sell some of his lands in the Vale in the 1850s. At the same time various other estates and small farms came up for sale and the brothers were quite spoilt for choice with around 50,000 acres available for purchase in the 1850s.⁵² By this time the Vale of Aylesbury's landholding patterns consisted of a large number of small estates. Thus it was relatively easy for the brothers to acquire many areas of the Vale piecemeal and consolidate them into more substantial estates, either directly themselves or through their agent James James. This strategy is revealed through the copious amounts of deeds and conveyances that survive for minor estates they purchased, now held at the Rothschild Archive London.

⁵¹ David Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches: historians and wealth in modern Britain', *Rothschild Archive Review of the Year*, (2001-2002), 12-23.

⁵² RAL, XI/109/72/2, Statement of Mayer de Rothschild's Sheriff's account, 7 August 1849; Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 35.

Thus by the mid-1870s Lionel, Anthony and Mayer all owned or resided in properties with associated estates in the Vale of Aylesbury. Throughout the 1850s and 60s the family continued to acquire yet more small landholdings in the area to add to these estates. They were often eager to acquire land adjoining that which they owned already, to extend and create contiguous estates. Upon Lionel's death in 1879 his sons would inherit over 10,000 acres in the Vale of Aylesbury, with an income of around £28,000 per year. Mayer's daughter similarly inherited around 5,500 acres at his death (with an income of just over £9,000 per year in 1877).⁵³

Further evidence of financial motivation lies in the fact that the brothers sometimes bought land in coalition. For example Nathaniel wrote to his brothers regarding some farms for sale in Buckinghamshire in 1851: 'If they pay 3¼% you might buy them for the house if not for one of us or all'.⁵⁴ In the same year Nathaniel also declared that he would: 'Willingly take ¼ share in Aston Clinton as well as the former [Halton]'.⁵⁵ In addition and as discussed in Chapter One Lionel's actions in acquiring separate estates intended for his three sons were probably part of a deliberate scheme to provide each of them with an investment in the form of a landed estate in the Vale of Aylesbury upon his death.

Anthony and Aston Clinton

Eager to create contiguous estates, when the Aston Clinton estate came on to the market the Rothschild family were keen to purchase it. They wrote to one another about the possibility.⁵⁶ Mayer attended one of the sales of the estates of the 2nd Duke of Buckingham in October 1848 in which the Aston Clinton estate was the primary item for sale (but withdrawn).⁵⁷ The family remained keen to purchase the estate when it was offered for sale again in 1849.⁵⁸ Mayer's land agent, Hart, inspected it around this time and Lionel wrote to him discussing a suitable price.⁵⁹ The family eventually decided to purchase the estate, but agreed they would pay no more than £26,000 as 'it is not like a fancy place'

⁵³ G.E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom, extant, extinct or dormant*, 14 vols (London: St Catherine Press, 1910-1998), under Rothschild and Rosebery respectively.

⁵⁴ RAL, XI/109/78/1, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 9 January 1851.

⁵⁵ RAL, XI/109/77/4, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 5 July 1851.

⁵⁶ 'Property', *The Times*, 9 June 1849, p. 11; RAL, XI/109/77/4, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 5 July 1851; 'The Sale of the Duke of Buckingham's Estates', *Bucks Chronicle*, 21 October 1848, p. 8.

⁵⁷ 'The Sale of the Duke of Buckingham's Estates', p. 8.

⁵⁸ Huntingdon Library, California, STC manorial papers, box 20, folder 13, Particulars of sale of Aston Clinton, 1849.

⁵⁹ RAL, XI/109/72/3, Lionel de Rothschild, Frankfurt to Mayer de Rothschild, London, 16 September 1849.

and was to be treated as an investment.⁶⁰ *The Times* wrote of the 1849 sale and concluded the estate to be 'a most eligible residence and secure investment of capital'.⁶¹ As has been suggested it is possible that the brothers provided the money for the purchase in collaboration.⁶²

Nathaniel and Tring Park

The Tring Park estate was not purchased by the Rothschild family until many decades after their initial rental of its stables. Following the acquisition of land at Mentmore in the early 1840s, the purchase of the Aston Clinton estate in 1849, and the purchase of the Halton estate in 1853 the family did not acquire any other large estates in the Vale until the 1870s.⁶³ Lionel's position changed in 1872 when the Tring Park Estate, comprising almost 4,000 acres, came on to the market. The acquisition of the estate was an opportunity not to be missed for the family: Lionel and his brothers, ever conscious of acquiring more land in the area, surely saw the investment potential of an estate neighbouring those they already owned. The sales brochure further highlighted the potential income to be had from it:

The lands are divided into numerous Compact Farms, with convenient Houses and Homesteads in the occupation of a well-satisfied and punctual Tenantry of long standing, at moderate Rents; including also the Tring Silk Mill...The whole Estate producing an actual Rental, amounting, to nearly £6000 Per Annum.⁶⁴

Alfred and Halton

Though not inclined to live in the Vale of Aylesbury, Lionel had expressed his interest in the Halton estate through the purchase of various parcels of land from the 1850s onwards in order to invest in land in the Buckinghamshire countryside. The estate at Halton (of 1,400 acres) was probably the largest single purchase Lionel made in the Vale of Aylesbury. Initially it was considered simply as a further investment in the Vale, and as an

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ 'Property', *The Times*, 9 June 1849, p. 11.

⁶² Though no evidence survives to identify who, or which of the four brothers in combination, provided what money for the purchase.

⁶³ Of course Lionel de Rothschild and his brothers continued to acquire small landholdings which surrounded the estates they had already purchased.

⁶⁴ CBS, DX258/13, Particulars and conditions of sale, Tring Park Estate, 7 May 1872.

estate over which Lionel and his brothers could hunt and shoot. The words of Lionel's brother Nathaniel to his brothers when learning the estate was to be sold are revealing: 'I recommend you strongly to buy Halton and a few farms. They cannot hurt'.⁶⁵ Nathaniel's continued correspondence with his brothers on the subject of the Halton estate reveals that they intended it merely as a sporting residence and investment: none of them had any significant intentions of residing there for the meantime.⁶⁶

Status

It is also probable that Lionel and his brothers established country residences for reasons of status and to enhance their position in British society. For many *nouveau-riche* families in this period the acquisition of an estate and/or the purchase (or building) of a country house could, as Richard Davis has it, 'serve as the centre and the symbol' of power and influence.⁶⁷ It may be that Lionel and his brothers acquired country estates and country residences with this aim in mind. The appreciation of the social and personal benefits a country residence would bring to oneself and one's family drove some men of comparatively 'new money' in the nineteenth century to consider becoming a 'country gentleman'. At a time when '710 individuals owned one-quarter of England and Wales', land ownership would often be a way for newly-wealthy men to gain further influence, either locally or nationally.⁶⁸ The ownership of a country estate inevitably implied a certain status and asserted one's power and position within the ruling classes.

Aware that a foreign Jewish family may face certain challenges in breaking into the upper social circles of nineteenth-century Britain the family's Aylesbury solicitor and agent, James James, of Horwood and James, advised the Rothschilds to consolidate their land holdings in the Vale as a means of securing social acceptance and political influence.⁶⁹ This may have influenced their decisions as regards land and property; they must have recognized that the estates and mansions they acquired would be a means of affirming their status. Furthermore by the 1870s the brothers were participating in the politics of both the Vale of Aylesbury and London. This assumption of political responsibilities was

⁶⁵ RAL, XI/109/77/1, Nathaniel Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 19 October 1850.

⁶⁶ RAL, XI/109/77/2, Nathaniel Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 13 November 1850.

⁶⁷ Davis, *The English Rothschilds*, p. 95.

⁶⁸ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 29.

⁶⁹ As J. K. Fowler records in his *Recollections of Old Country Life* (London, 1894), p. 167.

perhaps a deliberate undertaking by the family to gain a foothold in Britain's political sphere. Davis goes so far as to assert that 'from the beginning the Rothschild brothers had in mind taking their place within the political nation, what they considered their rightful place among its leaders, as members of Parliament.'⁷⁰ With country estates and houses Rothschild family members could play the part of local landowners and more easily engage in local politics.

The estates and mansion houses also inevitably revealed the family's social distinction and were a visible assertion of their wealth and status. In establishing so many residences within a relatively small area, and furthermore over several generations, they also established a sense of genealogical respectability. In this way the family was able to show and publicly display a sense of lineage and inheritance, quite the aristocratic rather than *nouveau-riche* attribute. Lionel de Rothschild's pivotal part in laying the basis for and encouraging this sense of dynastic settlement must be noted: it was he who initiated the purchase of three estates for his three sons (the Halton estate in 1853, the Ascott estate in 1860 and the Tring Park estate in 1872). He undoubtedly intended that these estates would further bolster the Rothschild family's presence in the Vale of Aylesbury and social and political standing.

It is therefore possible to see the English Rothschilds deliberately attempting to bolster and express their status and showing their social distinction through the construction and embellishment of property on their country estates. The mansions could act as theatres of wealth, of social distinction, and genealogical respectability. A journal entry composed by Anthony's wife, Louisa, of 1853 is revealing. She noted that 'the season is over and we are quietly established in our own little country house – a ten years' dream is realized...'⁷¹ Such a statement hints that the family had wished to establish a country property in the Vale of Aylesbury from as early as the 1840s.

It was not compulsory for the English Rothschild family as business professionals who had become newly-wealthy to take this course of action. Yet they did indeed decide to become landowners, choosing the Vale of Aylesbury to consolidate their interests. The family were amongst the most wealthy of newly-rich men of the nineteenth century, yet as discussed

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Rothschild*, p. 71.

⁷¹ RAL, 000/297, Selections from the Journals of Lady de Rothschild by Lucy Cohen (1920), 23 August 1853

rather than amassing land on a scale to rival the greatest landowners of Britain they instead purchased enough so as to enjoy a comfortable country lifestyle at the middle to lower end of the land-owning scale. The family never severed their connections with business and never substituted it with an income purely from landed estates, despite the acquisition of great wealth and high status from their 'industry'. A glance at the income of the Waddesdon estate is revealing here: its revenue was less than a fifth of what it cost to run it.⁷² There is no evidence to suggest English Rothschild family members were motivated by aims of gentrification in their purchase of land and acquisition or creation of large country mansions in this period. Cannadine asserts that 'for all their undeniable grandeur', the English Rothschilds were never 'supine slaves to the culture of gentility'.⁷³ The family's actions in this area never amounted to a conscious and wholesale campaign of 'gentrification'; they were not deliberately trying to emulate the aristocracy. Instead there were many other reasons for the acquisition of land and establishment of country mansions by the family, ones that were more immediate than the abstract considerations of the pursuit of power and status.

Involvement in politics and philanthropy

It is highly likely that the English Rothschild family invested in land and property in the Vale of Aylesbury in order to gain a political foothold in the area and become involved in local politics. By the 1840s English Rothschild family members wished to exert an influence in England which was not just based on their evident and established financial prowess, but also on estate ownership and local politics. Soon after making their first purchases of land and establishing permanent residences in the Vale the English Rothschilds sought to integrate themselves firmly into country life: Mayer, Anthony, and their nephews served the area variously as Sheriffs, Lord Lieutenants and Members of Parliament. As conscientious landowners they also ensured their estates were effectively managed, and the villages and farms which lay on them met the best possible standards. At the close of the century *Country Life* remarked:

⁷² Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 100.

⁷³ Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches: historians and wealth in modern Britain', 12-23.

The English members of the family have entered with zest into the occupations of country life...Lord Rothschild is a leading spirit in the agricultural development of the district about him, in cattle breeding, and in the hunting of the Vale of Aylesbury; Mr Alfred de Rothschild has extensive farms that are a pattern of arrangement and management.⁷⁴

The influence of the Rothschilds as estate owners in the Vale of Aylesbury is also highly apparent. The family were generous benefactors to those for whom they felt responsible, often going beyond the fashionable Victorian trend for such paternalistic patronage. Villages lying on their estates were completely transformed by the erection of new houses, cottages and farm buildings as well as hotels, village halls, recreation rooms, hospitals and schools, all for the benefit of local inhabitants.⁷⁵ A good deal of money was also spent on improving methods of agriculture on the estates, and trialling new farming practices.⁷⁶ These endeavours brought a significant measure of employment to an agricultural district when it was badly needed. *Country Life* happily concluded in 1903 that 'no part of England owes more to the care and liberality of its possessors'.⁷⁷

Mayer and Mentmore

Mayer integrated himself personally into the Vale of Aylesbury very soon after first purchasing land in the area: he ensured he played his part in local government and was appointed as High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1847. By the 1860s he was participating actively in the local politics of the area as Magistrate and also held office as Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire.⁷⁸ Not content with the size of his landholdings in the area at any point during his lifetime, Mayer continued to purchase land which lay in the surrounding area, further consolidating his position as an influential local landowner.

⁷⁴ 'Country Homes: Ascott', *Country Life Illustrated*, I (1897), 210-212.

⁷⁵ *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Nikolaus Pevsner and Elizabeth Williamson, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960; repr. 1994), p. 99; Interestingly the Rothschilds were following a trend pioneered by the Duke of Devonshire who had rebuilt the village of Edensor (the closest village to his residence at Chatsworth) with the aid of Sir Joseph Paxton in the 1840s.

⁷⁶ Wendy Austin, 'The Rothschild Estates', *Picture Postcard Monthly*, August (2001), 46-50.

⁷⁷ 'Tring Park, Hertfordshire, the Seat of Lord Rothschild', *Country Life*, XIV (1903), 724-726.

⁷⁸ 'Official Appointments and Notices', *The Times*, 14 November 1844; 'Official Appointments and Notices', *The Times*, 6 February 1847.

Mayer was a well-known figure in the Vale of Aylesbury. He ensured he acted as a model landowner, and had a genuine interest in philanthropy. Mayer and his daughter Hannah sought to improve their estate considerably: the church was restored, the fields drained and transformed into beautiful parkland, and the village modernised with new cottages and amenities.

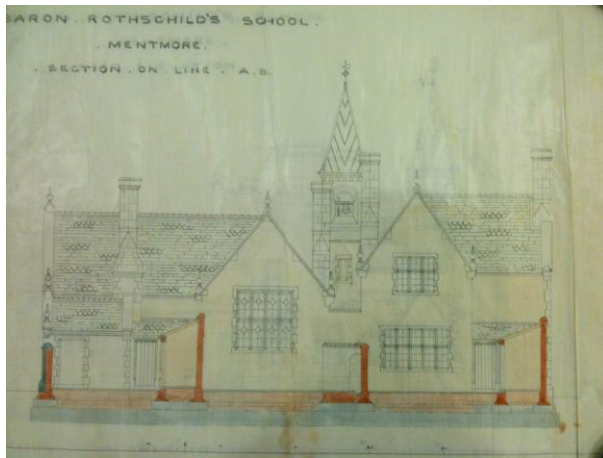


Figure 28: Tracings and elevations of Baron Rothschild's school. c. nineteenth century (CBS DRO/4/31)

Anthony and Aston Clinton

Lionel revealed a further, political motivation for the purchase of the Aston Clinton estate when he wrote to Mayer in 1849:

Also with regard to Aston Clinton I should go as far as £25,000. If you like to give a little more I should not hesitate...It would give a little interest in the Aylesbury Election which is also worth something.⁷⁹

Anthony's presence in the Vale of Aylesbury further consolidated the influence of the Rothschild family in local government: he was also appointed as High Sheriff for Buckinghamshire in 1860.⁸⁰ There is no doubt that Anthony and his brothers wished to take an active part in the politics of the Vale; an additional residence in the area would have made this a good deal more achievable. Of course it must be noted that Anthony had been appointed as a Baronet in 1847, two years before Aston Clinton had even been acquired. One might however speculate that ownership of this country estate further consolidated his position and status.

Anthony took to his new life as a 'country gentleman' enthusiastically and soon began buying land in the Vale himself when the opportunity arose.⁸¹ He was a keen countryman and model landowner, ensuring his estate tenants were well provided for. Perhaps in an effort to make themselves more visible (and following a popular trend of the time) Anthony and Louisa also took the trouble to host an Industrial Exhibition in 1868.⁸² Held on the neighbouring estate of Halton the exhibition was reported to have celebrated 'everything bearing on the lives of the people and their local industries' to 'encourage the development of industrial talent...to give it a direction tending to increase the health and comfort of the poor'.⁸³ The exhibition received praise from the local and national press and was reported as an undoubted success. Disraeli (in his first term of office as Prime Minister) and his wife attended the opening ceremony as did many other local estate owners and politicians. No less than 11 members of the Rothschild family were present.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ RAL, XI/109/72/2, Lionel de Rothschild to Mayer de Rothschild, Wildbad, 11 Aug 1849.

⁸⁰ 'Nomination of Sheriffs', *The Times*, 13 November 1860.

⁸¹ RAL, 000/68/3, Agreement of sale made between Humphrey Bull of Aston Clinton and Sir Anthony de Rothschild of Aston Clinton, 13 June 1861.

⁸² For example Sir Thomas and Lady Whitchole of Aswarby, Lincoln had also held such an exhibition for the 'benefit of the villages immediately adjoining them' and to 'encourage industry and awaken sloth': 'The Halton Industrial Exhibition', *Daily News*, 2 June 1868, p. 9; RAL 000/1258, Halton Industrial Exhibition: an account of the opening of the exhibition and catalogue of entries and prizes, 1868.

⁸³ 'The Halton Industrial Exhibition', *The Times*, 2 June 1868, p. 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 29: 'Mr Disraeli opening the industrial exhibition at Halton, Buckinghamshire', *Illustrated London News*, 1868 (RAL 000/711)

Nathaniel and Tring Park

Nathaniel's ownership of a landed estate in the Vale of Aylesbury probably enhanced his position in local and national politics also. This may have been a motivating factor in the purchase of the estate by Lionel along with his wish to have his son reside here. Yet Nathaniel had already been Liberal MP for Aylesbury since 1865, and in addition upon the death of his uncle Anthony in 1876 his title of Baronet had passed to Nathaniel. The ownership of Tring Park estate seemingly had little to do with such events. Perhaps more significantly however Nathaniel was created Baron Rothschild in 1885 and appointed Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire in 1889. It is possible that Nathaniel's involvement in local politics, and status as an active local landowner in the Vale of Aylesbury, enhanced his eligibility to achieve such honours.

Nathaniel was highly involved in his Tring Park estate, showing himself as a benevolent and enlightened landowner. With the help of his wife he undertook a programme of housing improvement and social and medical welfare in the town of Tring. Local architect William Huckvale was employed to improve, modify and ultimately transform much of the town: over 400 model farm buildings and 50 model cottages were rebuilt, the old Market House was demolished to create a public open space and a new Market House was erected.⁸⁵ The town benefitted greatly from employment which the Tring estate and the

⁸⁵ Huckvale chose a neo-Elizabethan or Tudor-revival style for his buildings: they often had timber framing, steeply-pitched roofs, ornate chimneys and tile-hangings. This gave a unifying style to the estate.

Rothschild family's projects offered. The family gave permission for the annual Tring Agricultural Show to be hosted on the estate on a number of occasions.



Figure 30: Cottages or almshouses at Tring commissioned by the Rothschild family in the nineteenth century



Figure 31: Tring Agricultural Show at Tring Park, J. T. Newman, Berkhamsted, c.1905

Alfred and Halton

Unlike his uncles and brothers Alfred did not hold any positions in local or national government. It seems he was little inclined to such undertakings, and instead took on public roles such as the Director of the Bank of England and Trustee of the National Gallery, London. There is little evidence to suggest Halton House (and the Halton estate) were possessions which were acquired (or built) in order to advance Alfred's involvement

in Britain's political sphere. Yet whilst never being inclined towards taking a seat in Parliament Alfred did have a strong interest in politics and especially international affairs. In the late-nineteenth century Alfred was so concerned about the state of relations between Britain and Germany that he was able to arrange meetings between British and German officials. In February 1898 for example a round table conference took place at Halton and was attended by Arthur Balfour, the foreign secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, and Count Hertzfeld, the German ambassador. Balfour noted 'Alfred abandoned his dining-room to us and provided a sumptuous 'dejeuner' between the courses of which there was an infinity of talk'.⁸⁶ As a venue for such events Halton House was thusly frequently key in Alfred's involvement in government affairs and in maintaining his position as a trusted government adviser.

Alfred was (like his relatives) a benevolent estate owner and many of his actions benefitted the local area. The employment which construction of the new mansion created was highly beneficial to surrounding villages and towns.⁸⁷ In addition Alfred provided the village with many new cottages and other buildings as well as a school and salaried school master.⁸⁸



Figure 32: Halton House under construction (RAF Halton Archive)

⁸⁶ B Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour* (London: Hutchinson, 1936), Vol I, p. 258.

⁸⁷ Perhaps as many as 2000 manual labourers were required to build the house, to complement the 200 joiners, 200 bricklayers, 100 plumbers, 100 plasterers and 100 drain layers. RAL, booklets and leaflets, box 2, anonymous pamphlet 'Halton House'.

⁸⁸ Beryl E. Escott, *The Story of Halton House, Country Home of Alfred de Rothschild*, 2nd edn (Halton House Officers' Mess, 2003), p. 41.

Leopold and Ferdinand

In continuing the pursuit of his family's political interests in the Vale of Aylesbury Leopold took over largely from his uncle Mayer, holding office as Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire. It is possible that this was a small part of his decision to inhabit the Ascott estate. Ferdinand also became involved in local politics, serving as High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1893 and being elected as Liberal MP for Aylesbury in 1885. The possession of a landed estate must have aided in such appointments.

Hospitality and entertainment

The Rothschild family's country retreats were not only of use to the individual, but also to the family's business activities. The family required venues in which to entertain guests, and particularly to entertain them with country living and country pursuits, as was expected at this time. Thus frequently politicians, diplomats, aristocrats, artists and other leading society figures were invited to dine, hunt and shoot in the Vale, enjoying the hospitality of the family in their new locality which was so accessible from London. The estates purchased by the Rothschilds in the area also afforded great scope and opportunities for shooting of game and hare, boasting great stocks of both. Unlike Gunnersbury Park therefore the estates here could also be used by the Rothschilds to entertain their guests or clients with shooting and hunting, and provide 'corporate hospitality'.⁸⁹ This did much to affirm and further strengthen the Rothschild family's position in society and in political circles.

Albert, Prince of Wales was one of the most famous of the Rothschild's guests, and his visits to Halton caused much excitement in the local area. The friendship had begun at Cambridge University where the Prince and the Rothschilds had shared a passion for horseracing and hunting. The Prince hunted with the Rothschild hounds in the Vale of Aylesbury and enjoyed the luxury and privacy that the family's residences here afforded him.⁹⁰ The Prince could also use his time spent with his Rothschild friends in the Vale to

⁸⁹ Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches: historians and wealth in modern Britain', 12-23.

⁹⁰ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 83.

benefit his other interests: here he could form alliances with other of the Rothschilds' guests, which frequently included leading politicians.

Mayer and Mentmore

Undoubtedly one of Mentmore's major functions was as a countryside entertainment venue in which Mayer could offer luxurious hospitality to business clients and associates. The size and plan of the house was designed with this function in mind: it was intended for entertainment on a grand scale. With around 80 rooms it was of a considerable size, and especially equipped to cater for guests and house parties with its Grand Hall, large dining room, two drawing rooms, billiard room, multiple guest bedrooms and vast separate service block.

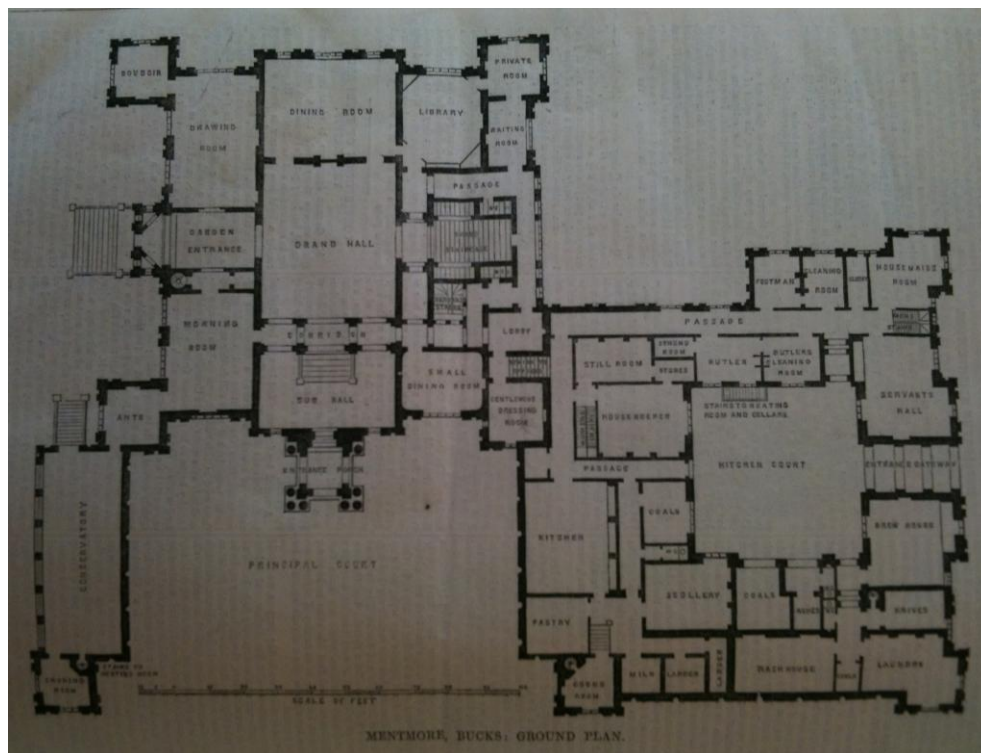


Figure 33: Plan of Mentmore House in *The Builder*, 776 (19 December 1857), p. 741

The main block of the house had an axial arrangement and reception rooms were distributed as satellites around the central Grand Hall.⁹¹ The revival of the great hall was one of the main changes to occur to the planning of the nineteenth-century house. Such halls began to be a popular feature and were included in a large number of country houses in the 1830s and 1840s as part of a general revival of what Girouard has termed 'old English hospitality'.⁹² Numerous nineteenth-century architects began to produce plans for country houses with large, central great halls in the medieval tradition.⁹³ Furthermore often the very grandest houses of the nineteenth century were expected to function like luxury hotels, entertaining and serving the needs of numerous guests and house parties. As a consequence many new houses featured impressive two-storey, central top-glazed great halls at the centre of their plans. Prominent examples include the Gothic-style Alton Towers in Staffordshire and the Jacobean Harlaxton Manor and Gothic Bayons Manor, both in Lincolnshire. Great halls continued to rise in popularity throughout the century and experienced a change in usage: no longer simply for formal dinners or balls, they were instead increasingly used as an extension of the general living space of the family and their guests. From the middle of the century they began to resemble modern-type informal living rooms, where all kinds of activities could be enjoyed, for example writing, billiards, reading, games, music and general socialising. The hall at Mentmore was typical of this trend: right in the centre of the house it dictated the rest of its symmetrical plan and acted as an 'inner court', impressively lit by Paxton's ridge-and-furrow glazed roof.⁹⁴

⁹¹ This was similar to Wollaton Hall though in fact it more closely resembles Barry's Reform Club. This theme of a great covered central court as the focus of the internal planning was also used in Barry's Cleveland House in Westminster of 1840, and in a country house setting at his Highclere Castle.

⁹² Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: a social and architectural history* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 288.

⁹³ One of the major advocates for the revival of great halls for country houses was A.W.N. Pugin; Jill Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan, 1835-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) p. 70.

⁹⁴ *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p. 473. This symmetry was sometimes considered inconvenient and was criticized as such by Kerr in his book of 1865.

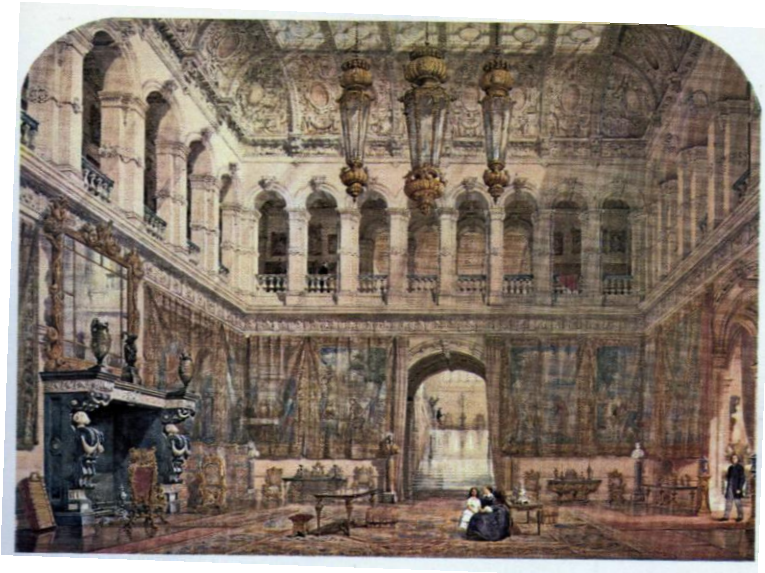


Figure 34: Grand Hall, Mentmore, by H. Brewer, 1863. Included are Juliana, Hannah and Mayer de Rothschild

In the late 1870s Lord Ronald Gower (1845-1916), the youngest son of the 2nd Duke of Sutherland, made a visit to Mentmore.⁹⁵ His description bears out how impressive and innovative Paxton's Grand Hall was for the time:

In November I visited the gorgeous abode of Baron Meyer [sic]...Entering it as we did, on the close of a winter's day, the effect of this great hall brilliantly lighted was enchanting.⁹⁶

The social use of the room was noted by the American novelist Henry James: he reported in a letter during one of his stays: 'they are at tea downstairs in a vast gorgeous hall, where the upper gallery looks down like the colonnade in Paul Veronese's pictures'.⁹⁷ The intention to employ Mentmore House as an entertainment venue was a major reason for the inclusion of such a room in the house. Its presence reveals that this function for the mansion was a priority for Mayer and his family.

⁹⁵ Gower mistakenly attributed the house to Sir Charles Barry.

⁹⁶ Lord Ronald Gower, *My Reminiscences*, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1883), II, p. 7.

⁹⁷ Henry James, Mentmore, to Mrs Henry James Senior, 28 November 1880: *Henry James: selected letters 1843-1916*, ed. by Leon Edel (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 172.

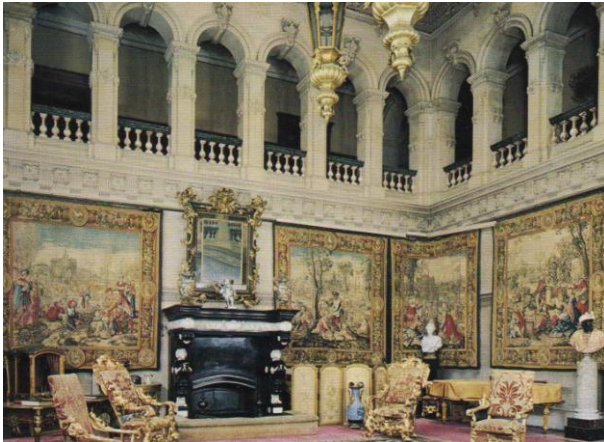


Figure 35: Mentmore House: Interior of the Grand Hall, 1977

The introduction of a smoking room (and perhaps also associated billiard room) was a major development for the country house of the nineteenth century. At Mentmore both rooms existed by 1883: when first built the house boasted a large conservatory in the south wing of the main house, however by 1883 it had been converted into a billiard room. A smoking room was also added to its east corner. This development and provision of such a space in the house reflected its use increasingly as a venue for social gatherings: importantly the rooms could act as spaces to which male guests and their hosts could retire to smoke and converse.

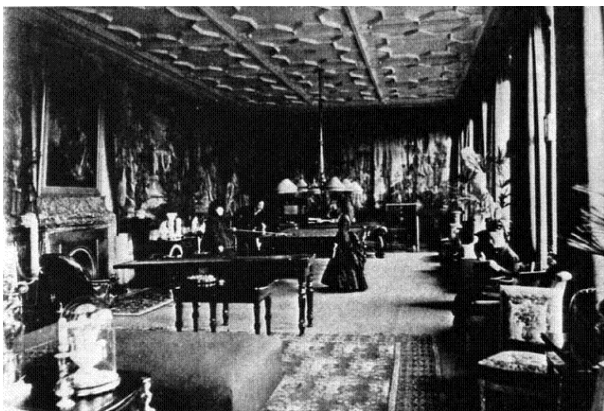


Figure 36: Billiards at Mentmore in the 1870s. The women standing are Hannah, Lady Rosebery and her mother but the man has not been identified (Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*)



Figure 37: Conservatory/Billiard Room, late-nineteenth century (RAL, 000/284)

During the season that Mayer and his family stayed at Mentmore the house was employed as a venue for hunting or shooting parties and other social gatherings. It was a venue in which to entertain and invite current or potential business clients and colleagues, or political and social allies. Guests were lavishly entertained with the finest food and often a day's hunting.⁹⁸ Frequent dinner parties and balls, as well as garden parties and more informal family occasions took place in the house and its grounds. Poems were written extolling Mentmore's beauty and even waltzes composed in its honour. A long list of eminent figures came to enjoy the hospitality, among them the Prince of Wales and regularly Disraeli.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Dennis Bidwell, *Mentmore Towers, a short history* (Beckford: BJB Publications, 1996), p. 11.

⁹⁹ See RAL, RFamC/8/20, Ferdinand de Rothschild to Leonora de Rothschild, 6 March 1868; RAL, RFamC/4/80, Lionel de Rothschild, New Court to Charlotte de Rothschild, Paris, 3 March 1868. Both on the subject of the Prince of Wales' visit to Mentmore.

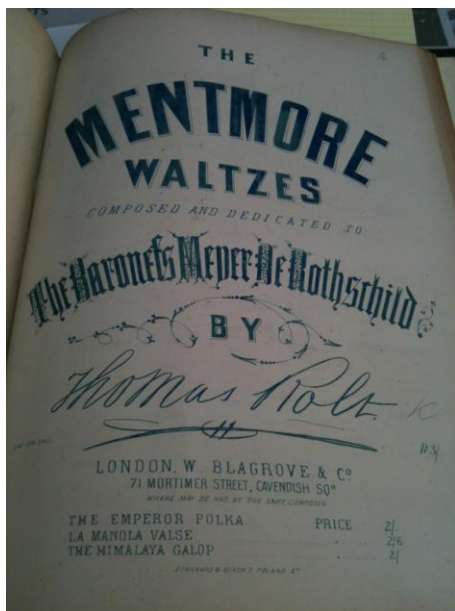


Figure 38: The Mentmore Waltzes, composed and dedicated to the Baroness Mayer de Rothschild, by Thomas Rolt, 1854 (British Library, h.975.h.[34.])

Anthony and Aston Clinton

During one of many short stays in the early 1850s when the Aston Clinton estate had just been purchased by the family Louisa remarked in her journal that she found the house 'too small to be comfortable'.¹⁰⁰ She repeated her concerns a month later: 'I wish the house were a little larger and the place somewhat prettier so that I might settle down without any thoughts of moving.'¹⁰¹ It is evident that Anthony and his family considered their new residence much too small for their requirements and in the years following its purchase he set about enlarging and improving it.¹⁰²

A new Dining Room was added at one side of the existing structure, as well as a new 'Billiard Room building', Saloon Hall, offices and Conservatory.¹⁰³ New bedrooms were created over the offices, a new kitchen provided and new corridors on the ground and first

¹⁰⁰ RAL, 000/297, Selections from the Journals of Lady de Rothschild by Lucy Cohen (1920), 15 May 1853.

¹⁰¹ RAL, 000/297, Selections from the Journals of Lady de Rothschild by Lucy Cohen (1920), 5 July 1853.

¹⁰² 'Manor House, Aston Clinton, Bucks', *Bucks Herald*, 9 March 1850.

¹⁰³ RAL, XII/2/0, Myers Accounts, 1856-1857; Oonagh Kennedy of the National Trust has recently noted that the Saloon Hall measured about 46 by 42 feet and led out to a loggia and the Italian Garden: Oonagh Kennedy, 'The success of excess: aspects of Englishness in some of the Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury', in *Architecture & Englishness 1880-1914*, ed. by David Crellin and Ian Dungavell (London: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 2006), 74-78.

floors were also created.¹⁰⁴ The old entrance porch was extended into a large *porte cochère* and terrace steps added to the outside of the Drawing and Dining Room windows. The total cost of the work is not known. The sum of £19,834.13.4 appears in the builder George Myers accounts and we may conclude this was around the total amount for the contract.¹⁰⁵ A drawing by Alice Rothschild (1847-1922) of 1863 shows the front of the mansion after the alterations and extensions were completed.¹⁰⁶



Figure 39: A Drawing of Aston Clinton House from the sketchbook of Alice de Rothschild, c.1863 (The Rothschild Collection, Waddesdon Manor)

In 1877, a year after Anthony's death, his eldest daughter Constance married Cyril Flower (1843-1907, 1st Baron Battersea from 1892) and they made Aston Clinton their home in the Vale. The couple carried out further alterations to the house: Lucy Cohen reports that an additional wing was added, probably in the 1870s or 1880s.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century the renovated house had grown from its humble origins to an impressive mansion. It boasted the principal reception and entertainment rooms deemed essential for a country house of any significance in this period and provided 13 principal bed and dressing rooms, 17 secondary and servants' bedrooms, four bathrooms, and large domestic offices. It had a luxurious and comfortable interior, formal gardens, and stabling for 32 horses.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ RAL, XII/2/0, Myers Accounts, 1856-1857

¹⁰⁵ RAL, XII/41/1, Mayer Amschel Receipted Accounts, 1856-1857; RAL, XII/4/1, Invoice from Sir John Lee to Sir Anthony de Rothschild, 1857-1859.

¹⁰⁶ Waddesdon Manor Archive, 146.1997, Alice de Rothschild's sketchbook, Main Front of Aston Clinton, c.1863.

¹⁰⁷ Lucy Cohen, *Lady de Rothschild and her Daughters 1821-1931* (London: John Murray, 1935), p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 947/40, Aston Clinton Estate, Catalogue of mansion and estate by direction of N. Charles Rothschild, 1923.



Figure 40: Aston Clinton House, c. late-nineteenth century

One of the reasons for the acquisition of the Aston Clinton estate and house is reflected in these extensions. The additions in particular of a Saloon Hall and Billiard Room indicate that Anthony required bigger, new, designated and varied areas in his house for the entertainment of the family and their guests. Further bedrooms were also now provided to accommodate them. It is possibly that the house was purchased and extended specifically with its function as a countryside entertainment venue in mind.

Though perhaps not as ‘crowded with the starts [sic] of the social and political firmaments of London’ Aston Clinton was the scene of the usual sumptuous Rothschild hospitality.¹⁰⁹ Anthony hosted varied entertainments: formal balls and more intimate dinner parties, as well as large shooting parties. In 1873 he entertained the Prince of Wales, and in the following year his younger brother the Duke of Edinburgh and the Russian Tsarevich Alexander (the brother-in-law of the Princess of Wales). Famous musicians were often invited to perform.¹¹⁰ Upon Anthony’s death it was noted that Aston Clinton had been ‘the constant scene of a hospitality which embraced Royalty and distinguished persons of all classes and professions’. The author continued to note that ‘some of the most interesting society of the last 30 years will always be associated with it.’¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 344.

¹¹⁰ ‘The Prince of Wales’s Visit to Aston Clinton’, *The Morning Post*, Friday 10 January 1873, p. 2, Issue 3136.

¹¹¹ ‘Death of Sir Anthony Rothschild, Bart.’, *The Morning Post*, Wednesday 5 January 1876, p. 5, Issue 32299.



Figure 41: 'Card playing at Aston Clinton' from the album of pen and ink sketches by Annie de Rothschild (1844-1926), c.1860-1869 (RAL, 000/1709)

Nathaniel and Tring Park

Nathaniel quickly set about alterations to the existing house at Tring when it was acquired (most likely with the guidance of his father). The resulting renovation and extension which took place in the 1870s reflected the intended use of the property as a venue in which to entertain fellow politicians, society figures, clients from the Rothschild bank and even members of the royal family.

Mark Girouard finds that 'the manner of living in this period' required a country residence with more bedrooms, more various apartments of the ground floor, and a larger, perhaps more complex servants' wing. These changes were exactly what Nathaniel brought about at Tring Park: the attic floor was raised to create a new third floor for the main house and provide 14 extra rooms (used as guest bedrooms, servants' rooms and nursery rooms). The service wing leading off the west side of the house was raised one floor also and provided nine extra rooms, largely employed as servants' bedrooms. Notably a large polygonal block was added to the south-west of the main house to create a large new room known as the Billiard Room or Smoking Room. Photographs of the room taken in 1890 indicate that at this time it was probably used as a study or sitting room.



Figure 42 (left): Plan of Tring Park and Town, 1877 (RAL, H&J/Tr5.57.5)

Figure 43 (right): Tring Park, 1897 Ordnance Survey Map

The outline of the mansion as shown on this map reveals the outline of the new extension to the south-west.

As head of the Rothschild bank after 1879 Nathaniel enjoyed the company of many leading political and society figures. He also maintained a friendship with the Prince of Wales which had begun during their time at Cambridge. Nathaniel often hosted social gatherings, dinner parties and shooting parties which were attended by such figures as Disraeli, William Gladstone, Lord Balfour and Lord Rosebery.

Alfred and Halton

Alfred was undoubtedly motivated in his construction of a new mansion house by his desire for a suitable venue in which to entertain friends. The house was primarily intended as a weekend retreat and a venue for house parties: it was built to impress and amuse. Adèle Meyer (1862-1930), wife of Carl Meyer, 1st Baronet 1st Baronet Shortgrove (1851-1922), recalled that Alfred was a

charming, amiable and courtly “homme du monde” and his chief preoccupation always seemed to be thinking what he could do to give pleasure to others. He

delighted in giving his friends and their families any service which his Rothschild money and influence enabled him to do.¹¹²

Alfred held many public positions during his life, all of which required him to cultivate impeccable social skills and entertain important society figures. Such positions included Director of the Bank of England, Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Consul General, Trustee of the London National Gallery and member of the executive committee responsible for the opening of the Wallace Collection to the public. A country house, rapidly reached from London by train, with ample opportunities for country leisure pursuits and provided with every luxury, must therefore have been highly desirable. The mansion became for Alfred a way of providing Mayfair hospitality in a rural setting.

The location and plan of the mansion reflects its use as an entertainment venue. A hilltop location was chosen, high above the village, in order that guests might enjoy privacy and views of the surrounding area. In one major element of its design Halton House had much in common with Mentmore House: it boasted an imposing, two-storey hall at the centre of its plan. The height of the ceiling in this grand room (31 feet) was intended to astonish, and to provide a large space for guests to congregate and entertainments to be held. A vast domed window in the ceiling allowed light to flow in to the room from above and large mirrors and many high arches at both ground and first floor level made the room appear even lighter. The Salon was ideal for large parties, especially dancing. The gallery which ran around the room at first floor level also afforded an invaluable area from which to observe the festivities below.

¹¹² Carl Meyer, 1st Baronet, had been a senior employee of the Rothschild bank from 1872-1896: Collection of Dr Tessa Murdoch, *A Sketch of the Life of Carl Meyer, compiled from his letters and notes made by his widow Adèle Lady Meyer*, edited by H. M. Sykes (at times) Secretary, p.13.



Figure 44: Halton House, Salon, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 45: Halton House, Salon, 2011

With five or six large reception rooms, a dining room which sat as many as 40, and around 15 bedroom suites (many of which had separate dressing rooms and so could be converted into two bedrooms if required), the house was designed with the accommodation of guests in mind. As was still common for country houses built in this period, Halton contained certain territories which were reserved specifically for male and female inhabitants: the ground floor was broadly split through its central east-west axis into rooms intended for use by the gentlemen (the South Drawing Room, the Smoking Room and the Billiard Room) and those intended for the ladies (the North Drawing Room and the

Boudoir).¹¹³ Whilst the drawing rooms could be employed as entirely separate spaces, the major function of Halton House as a venue for large parties is revealed in the design of these rooms: an ante-room lay in the centre of the two drawing rooms and the adjoining doors for each could slide back to combine all three spaces and provide a large single chamber. This arrangement was in fact present for all the doors of the rooms which adjoined the Salon.

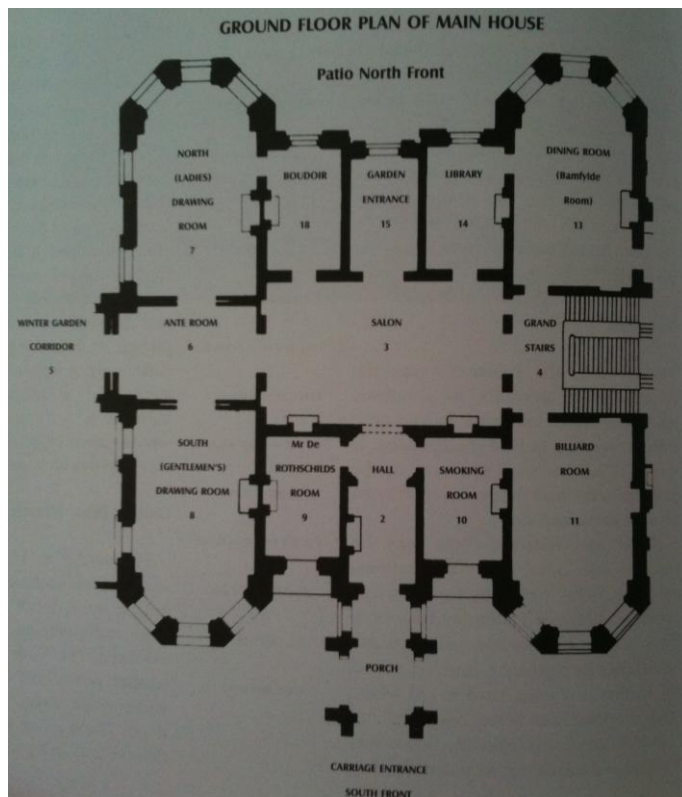


Figure 46: Halton House, plan of Ground Floor (Escott, *The Story of Halton House, Country Home of Alfred de Rothschild*)

¹¹³ Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 24.

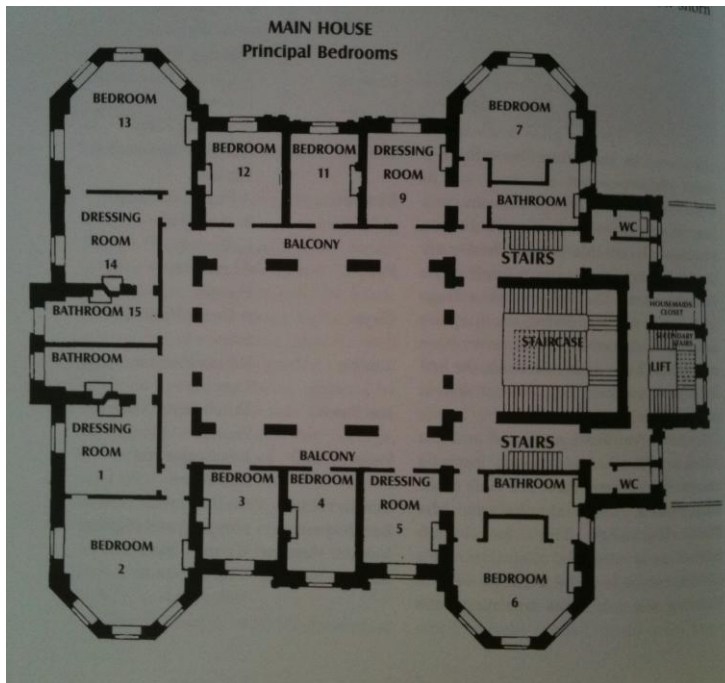


Figure 47: Halton House, plan of First Floor (Escott, *The Story of Halton House, Country Home of Alfred de Rothschild*)

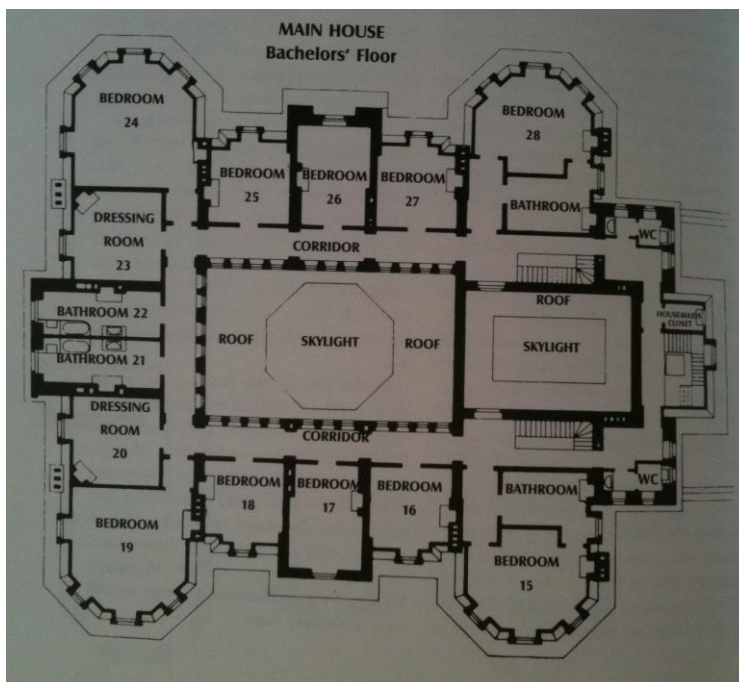


Figure 48: Halton House, plan of Second Floor (Escott, *The Story of Halton House, Country Home of Alfred de Rothschild*)

Other features of the house make its function clear: the room at Halton known as the Winter Garden has been described by Girouard as a 'notable *tour de force* of Rothschild extravagance'. This octagonal structure was a large and elaborate type of conservatory, unusual for this period in its size and construction. Alfred took advantage of new technology to create an impressive structure and theatrical space for his guests.¹¹⁴ A terrace led from the Winter Garden to formal gardens full of features to amuse guests: a Chinese Water Garden, a Grotto, an Italian Garden, rose gardens and summer houses. There was also a large lake, which was often the location of Alfred's outdoor parties and ice-skating in the winter.



Figure 49: Halton House, Winter Garden, J. Thompson, c.1887 (NMRC)

Alfred admired his new residence, and desired his guests should do the same. This is evident if we consider he commissioned the royal photographer S.G. Payne to produce a run of photograph albums containing images of the mansion's exterior and interior.¹¹⁵ These large albums, bound in blue leather, bearing Alfred's monogram and the date 1888,

¹¹⁴ Escott, *The Story of Halton House*, p. 72.

¹¹⁵ Payne advertised himself as 'Photographer to the Queen and Royal Family, medalist of the Photographic Society of Great Britain', his offices were close by in Aylesbury: RAL, 000/887, Halton House Album, c. 1888; Barbara Lasic 'A Display of Opulence: Alfred de Rothschild and the Visual Recording of Halton House', *Furniture History*, 40 (2004), 135-150.

contained 24 photographs and were given to friends and family as presents and souvenirs.¹¹⁶ They were often dedicated by Alfred personally as mementos.¹¹⁷

Halton House lent itself perfectly to the role as a lavish location in which Alfred could entertain his friends for a short stay. It is not clear how much time Alfred spent here: certainly he took a month's holiday for the partridge shooting season every year and this is when his house parties would take place (anytime from mid-August to February). At other times the house would be left empty: Meyer noted on one of his visits in 1885 that the house was 'very cold, not having been inhabited for 2 months'.¹¹⁸ Meyer's letters often hint that Alfred travelled to Halton sometimes for a few days at a time with one or two companions, in order to hunt and shoot before returning to London.¹¹⁹

Alfred's parties were legendary and attracted the cream of society. His guests would arrive by train in his special coach at Tring Station and be met by carriages. Many famous figures attended his gatherings, and the finest artists of the day were invited to perform. The guest books for the house include names ranging from statesmen and politicians, to actresses or musicians and leading society figures. They included the Prince of Wales, Disraeli, Earl Kitchener, the Shah of Persia, Herbert Henry Asquith, the 5th Earl of Carnarvon, the actress Lily Langtry, the composer Franz Liszt, and the opera singers Nellie Melba and Adelina Patti. Alfred's guests enjoyed his lavish hospitality and were provided with every comfort; the food and entertainment were of the highest quality. Visitors were encouraged to take a grand tour of the house and gardens (and view Alfred's collections of paintings and *objets d'art*), and take advantage of the Halton estate for walking, riding, hunting and shooting.

A private orchestra was often in residence in Halton village and would play several times a day at the house during parties, often with Alfred himself conducting. Perhaps most extravagant was the troop of performing animals kept for the circus Alfred put on with himself as ringmaster. Frances Greville, Countess of Warwick (1861-1938) for example noted that

¹¹⁶ Two such albums are now found at RAL (000/887) and perhaps as many as four are in the museum at RAF Halton.

¹¹⁷ One for example was inscribed to his architect, and another 'For dear Almina, with my best love, Alfred de Rothschild, 29 March 1892'. Almina, Countess of Carnarvon (1876-1969), said to be Alfred's illegitimate daughter.

¹¹⁸ Collection of Dr Tessa Murdoch, Carl Meyer, Halton, to Adele Meyer, 3 April 1885.

¹¹⁹ Collection of Dr Tessa Murdoch, Letters from Carl Meyer to Adele Meyer, 1885-1890.

Mr Alfred Rothschild would always contrive to make you feel that, of all his guests, you were the one whose presence meant most to him. Mr Alfred can be best described as a connoisseur of the fine art of living.¹²⁰

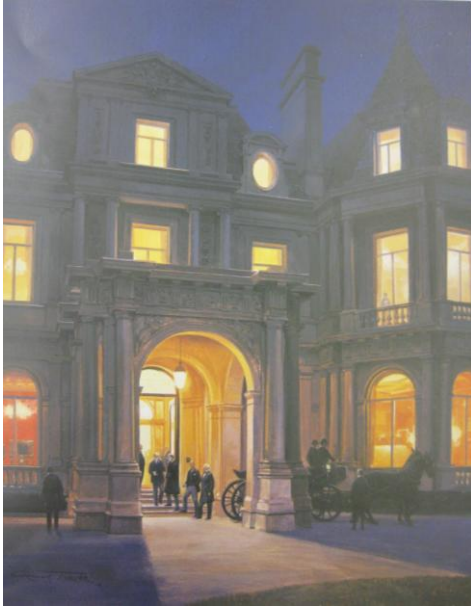


Figure 50: Alfred de Rothschild welcomes the Prince of Wales to the first social gathering at Halton Mansion on 15th January 1884. From an original painting by Graham Turner (RAL, 000/1503)

Leopold and Ferdinand

As well as being a family home, Ascott was also a venue for entertainment of Leopold's friends and distinguished guests. Leopold hosted many hunting parties for his friends, politicians and society figures.¹²¹ In her memoirs Constance Battersea described her cousin and life at Ascott favourably:

He [Leopold] was a delightful host, and never happier than when entertaining his numerous guests and members of his family...Ascott became well known as a perfect week-end house for tired statesmen and men of business.¹²²

¹²⁰ Frances Greville, Countess of Warwick, *Afterthoughts* (London, Cassel & Co., 1931), p. 91.

¹²¹ Leopold de Rothschild was also a friend of Albert Prince of Wales, who occasionally visited Ascott.

¹²² Battersea, *Lady de Rothschild, extracts from her notebooks*, p. 24 and p. 49.

Ferdinand did not intend Waddesdon Manor to exist simply as a museum and must have been motivated in its creation by a wish to extend country hospitality to his friends and relations. In fact he used the house predominantly as an entertainment venue and found much pleasure in sharing it (and his art collections) with family and friends. The house was generally only used for weekend festivities and hunting parties and was certainly not employed as a family home, as was the case for other Rothschild properties in the Vale. Ferdinand's parties were well-known and he was a generous host; almost 600 guests visited the house between 1880 and 1898, including politicians, diplomats, royalty, artists and relatives.¹²³ Dorothy de Rothschild (1895-1988), wife of Ferdinand's great nephew (James Armand de Rothschild, 1878-1957) finds that Ferdinand was 'fully alive to the role a large country house could play in the game of party politics'.¹²⁴ The Prince of Wales was a regular visitor and the Shah of Persia and Emperor Frederick III and his wife (daughter of Queen Victoria) also came. The visit of Queen Victoria to Waddesdon in 1890 was a great triumph for the family: Ferdinand deliberately ensured the event was recorded in the *Illustrated London News* revealing his awareness of the need for such publicity for his family.¹²⁵ The Queen was reportedly delighted with her visit.

Collecting

As will be explored more fully in later chapters the English Rothschild family were enthusiastic in maintaining properties in which their passion for collecting furniture, paintings and *objets d'art* could be indulged. This factor was a high priority for certain family members (for example Mayer and Alfred) and was a powerful motivation behind the acquisition of country houses as locations in which to suitably display certain collections.

Mayer and Mentmore

Mentmore House was a particularly fitting setting for Mayer's extensive collections of paintings, furniture and *objet d'art*. His interest and enjoyment in collecting and interiors may have partly motivated him in the construction of his new mansion. John Martin

¹²³ Svend Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor, A Guide to the House and its Contents* (National Trust, 1982), p. 8.

¹²⁴ Mrs James de Rothschild, 'Introduction', in *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor* (Fribourg, Office du Livre for the National Trust, 1967).

¹²⁵ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 85.

Robinson writes that Mayer had 'started to collect works of art in the 1840s with the intention of building a house'.¹²⁶ It is probable that he had been planning the purchase of a large estate and establishment of a country residence for almost a decade before Mentmore was begun. Mayer's granddaughter, Margaret Crewe-Milnes, Marchioness of Crewe (1858-1945), reported that 'when the management of the firm devolved in his eldest brother, Lionel, my grandfather began to give more and more time to collecting works of art – and race horses – and less and less to banking.'¹²⁷ Not only a sumptuous statement in its exterior, Mayer filled his new mansion with a large and opulent collection of art objects. The house came to be considered as the apex of a particular style, which would later be referred to as *le goût Rothschild*.

Alfred and Halton

Alfred was a formidable collector of paintings, furniture and *objets d'art*. It is highly likely that Halton House was created not only to be an entertainment venue for Alfred's guests, but also to act as a suitable backdrop for his growing art collection: indeed the two uses could be judged as inseparable. This motive is clear when we consider Alfred was concerned that his architects design the interior of his new mansion so as to suitably house his collections for maximum impact.¹²⁸

Ferdinand and Waddesdon

Ferdinand was an active and talented collector of paintings, furniture and *objets d'art*. His new residence at Waddesdon was designed with his collecting activities in mind and intended from its conception to be a location in which Ferdinand's collections could be displayed: as soon as the building was completed it was filled with his extensive collections of art and furniture. Ferdinand's wish for such a residence was one of the major factors behind his purchase of the Waddesdon estate.

¹²⁶ Robinson, 'Architecture and Setting', in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, pp. 5-6; Martin Robinson does not cite the sources for his assertions but personal receipts belonging to Mayer concerning his purchases of works of art do exist and date from 1835 onwards: RAL, 000/XII/41/5 and 6; Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883).

¹²⁷ Margaret Crewe-Milnes, Marchioness of Crewe, 'Memories of the grand life in the vast treasure chest of Mentmore', *The Times*, 26 February 1977, p. 12.

¹²⁸ British Library, Add. MS. 47913, fos. 412-13, Diaries of Lady Battersea 1858-1928.

Conclusion

That the ownership of a country estate and house might bring social and political benefits cannot have failed to have been appreciated by the English Rothschild family in the nineteenth century. The country estates and houses they established at this time enabled the family to aim for a greater degree of social acceptability through the provision of countryside hospitality to leading society figures and political allies. The estates also enabled them to gain a political foothold in the local politics of Buckinghamshire, which must have aided their entry into the House of Commons and national politics.

However these were not the only and exclusive reasons why the family moved to the Vale, and the desire for 'gentrification' was not a major motivating factor. There is no evidence to support the idea that the family were attempting to deliberately emulate the aristocratic classes in their actions in order to become exactly like them. Instead the family's love of country pursuits and wish for leisure time and privacy away from London were the paramount reasons. In addition the large mansions offered venues in which to indulge in their love of collecting and the creation of decorative and lavish interiors. Importantly the Rothschild family never abandoned their roots in business as highly successful City bankers and in an attempt to simply own landed estates: instead they combined their commitment to their 'industry' with part-time country living.

Chapter Three

The Rothschild Family and British Society

Anglo-Jewry in nineteenth-century Britain

When exploring the Rothschilds in society in this period, consideration must be given to the fact that they were Jewish. By the end of the nineteenth century Nathaniel de Rothschild was the 'supreme merchant banker in the City' and the English Rothschilds were monumental figures in the world of international finance.¹ They were not only vastly wealthy but also regarded as one of the most prominent families in British society. This achievement is all the more remarkable considering many legal disabilities barring Anglo-Jews from certain areas of society were still in place well into the nineteenth century: until the 1840s British Jews could not officially hold public office, could be prevented from voting, and could not serve in Parliament until 1858. Until 1828 only 12 seats in the Exchange could be occupied by Jews and before 1833 they could not practice as barristers. They were also barred from obtaining a degree from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge until 1854 and 1856 respectively; even when such formal restrictions were withdrawn colleges could be adverse to accepting them. Often this meant that Jewish citizens could not gain the qualifications needed to join certain professions. Finally until 1846 there were doubts as to whether British Jews could legally hold freehold land.² As Chaim Bermant of course notes 'not all of the disabilities were painful, and many, perhaps most, Jews were untouched by them'.³ In fact many of the restrictions cited above were unofficially wavered in practice. Yet to the Rothschilds, and other influential leaders of the Jewish community in this period, any restrictions on their freedom as a result of their religion were an affront to their positions as Englishmen. In a sense, until the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-Jews were still not accepted but only tolerated, while being excluded from major civic opportunities and considered inferior or untrustworthy. The leading Jewish families sought recognition of their business success and their support for the nation, and were committed to seeing Jews admitted to the highest political and social positions in Britain.

¹ Chaim Bermant, *The Cousinhood* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971), p. 119.

² Israel Finestein, *Jewish Society in Victorian England* (London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co., 1993)

³ Bermant, *The Cousinhood*, p. 61.

Whilst many in society saw the old restrictions against Jews as outdated, earlier prejudices often remained. The views of earlier generations that Jews constituted a separate and distinct nation, unable to be entirely Englishmen, sometimes persisted. Such lingering feelings maintained opposition to the admission of Jews into public office and Parliament in the first-half of the nineteenth century. Political emancipation in particular for Anglo-Jews was a hard-fought battle and the matter was resolved only after almost three decades of parliamentary debate. Lionel de Rothschild was one of the protagonists in the attempt to secure the enactment of the Jewish Disabilities Act, which was only approved by Parliament in 1858. For some, ancient prejudices were too ingrained to be removed, a group which included a large number of Peers. The example of Queen Victoria and Nathaniel de Rothschild reveals how long latent Jewish prejudice could last: even by 1869 Queen Victoria refused her Prime Minister's recommendation that Nathaniel be awarded a peerage. She wrote of a 'feeling of which she cannot divest herself, against making a person of the Jewish religion a Peer', and added that Nathaniel was no more than a gambler 'on a gigantic scale', and thus 'far removed from that legitimate trading which she delights to honour'.⁴ On a popular level malicious and crude depictions and images of Jews also still persisted. Writers of novels, newspapers and plays continued to reference 'grasping and lipping' Jews in their work: for example Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope.⁵ Such stereotypes drew on inherited and popular prejudices which identified Jews as inferior and alien.

In reality however such prejudices in the first-half of the nineteenth century were rarely popularly endorsed and any anti-Semitic events were isolated and small in scale. Indeed the 1830s and 40s saw the advancement of moves towards full Jewish emancipation in Britain. Such efforts were promoted by a general movement in Victorian society: the spreading of philosophies of 'utilitarianism, individualism and political reform', as well as the economic advancement of the middle classes.⁶ Most Victorians were not worried by Jewish integration, and saw it as part of a broad debate concerning the successful assimilation of all races into the State. Jewish emancipation in Britain was on the whole

⁴ M.C.N. Salbstein, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Britain* (London: Associated University Presses, 1982), p. 217; Niall Ferguson has also however suggested that although the Queen admitted to an aversion 'to making a person of the Jewish religion a peer' her true reasons were as much social and political as religious: see Niall Ferguson, *The World's Banker: The History of the House of Rothschild* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p. 772.

⁵ Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 155.

⁶ Finestein, *Anglo-Jewry in Changing Times*, p. 3.

gradual and unsensational, and the barriers which barred Jews from full participation in the social, political and cultural life of the country were steadily brought down. The process was not completed until 1871 with the introduction of the Promissory Oaths Act at which point Anglo-Jews were free from formal constraint.⁷ The efforts of Lionel de Rothschild and his son Nathaniel in particular, along with their relations, were a significant help to the cause of Jewish emancipation in Britain throughout the nineteenth century.

From the 1870s onwards however the attitude towards Jews in Britain altered somewhat as public attention was drawn towards the Anglo-Jewish community more intently and pessimistically. Wider political events such as the Russo-Turkish War and the Boer War caused many to accuse Anglo-Jews of pursuing their own interests, apart from the British state. Disraeli's racial origins were referenced as his policy towards Turkey in 1875-78 was criticised, particularly his 'apparent indifference' to the massacre of Bulgarian Christians.⁸ Critics of 'imperial expansion' asserted that London-based Jewish financiers and South African Jewish mine owners had forced Britain into the Boer War in order to 'safeguard and extend their interests in South Africa'.⁹ In addition the arrival in Britain of large numbers of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe also heightened hostility towards Jews in the later-nineteenth century. In 1830 the Jewish population of England stood at 27,000-28,000, by 1880 it was around 46,000 and by 1919 it had risen as high as 250,000.¹⁰ The immigrants of the 1880s caused a sensation as they crowded into East London and England's industrial cities and took up labour-intensive jobs that were already in short-supply at a time of economic recession. These immigrants were generally highly traditional, Orthodox and from poor communities, thus they appeared exceedingly different to emancipated British Jews and conspicuously foreign as a result.¹¹ Middle and lower-class hostility towards these communities was naturally ignited. Physical violence towards Jews in Britain in this period was rare, but verbal abuse appears to have risen not only towards the lower classes but in the Clubs and drawing rooms of the upper classes. Anti-Semitism at this time was undoubtedly less extreme as in other European countries. It was present however, and aided the persistence of ideas that Anglo-Jews were associated with 'alien, un-English customs, with superstition, dirt, clannishness, and crime, and had

⁷ Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: a history of anti-Semitism in England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 84.

⁸ Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000*, p 151.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora*, p. 255.

¹¹ Michael Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 225.

cosmopolitan loyalties'.¹² Three examples illustrate the kind of attitudes Anglo-Jews could face: the novelist Robert Smith Surtees (1805-1864) in his work *Ask Mamma* includes a character who, as a Christian convert and 'avaricious swindler', 'abandons commerce and sets up as a country gentleman'. In addition in Surtees's novel *Plain or Ringlets* there appears a 'party of cigar-smoking Israelites' lounging in a carriage at the races 'with their great arms over the side, like half-drunken sailors on a spree' and the Misses Jewissons who turn up their 'oily hook noses at everything'.¹³ Secondly the illustrator of certain of Surtees's novels, John Leech (1817-1864), also aided in maintaining such caricatures in his cartoons: one he drew for *Punch* in 1854 (*Bubbles of the Year - Cheap Clothing*) showed a fat, hook-nosed Jew surveying a 'workroom of cross-legged skeletons stitching away on the benches' as he puffed on a cigar.¹⁴ Finally when the writer Charles James Apperley (1777-1843) contemplated the sale of his ancestral country home he imagined his 'heart bleeding' if it were to become the possession of 'some half-bred Englishman - some Dutch-Jew broker'.¹⁵

The English Rothschild family and Judaism

Alongside considerations of their position within society in this period it is important to consider the English Rothschild family's personal commitment to their religion. According to Niall Ferguson, Lionel and his two brothers 'continued to consider themselves "good Israelites", observing holy days and avoiding work on the Sabbath'.¹⁶ It appears they still fasted at Yom Kippur and fasted and prayed on the Day of Atonement for example. Yet they were not as Orthodox as some: they did not keep strict kosher for instance. Yet as Ferguson also suggests the extent of Rothschild religious commitment in the 1840s-70s should 'not be underestimated: if anything, it was greater than had been the case in the 1820s and 1830s'.¹⁷ For the English Rothschild family religion was important, and they were considered as amongst the highest ranking leaders of Jewish society in Britain in the nineteenth century. They were heavily and seriously involved in public Jewish

¹² Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000*, p. 155.

¹³ Surtees, *Ask Mamma*, passim; R.S. Surtees, *Plain or Ringlets?* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1860) pp. 81-2, 114. Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 186.

¹⁴ Anne and Roger Cowen, *Victorian Jews Through British Eyes* (Oxford: Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 4, illustration; Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 186.

¹⁵ *The Sporting Magazine*, 16 (1825), p. 241; Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 186.

¹⁶ Ferguson, *The World's Banker*, p. 615.

¹⁷ Ibid.

organisations and were committed to improving the lot of their fellow Jews in Britain (as well as frequently that of foreign Jews). Lionel, Anthony, Mayer, Nathaniel, Alfred and Leopold all variously served as wardens and presidents of the Great Synagogue, the United Synagogue and the Jews' Free School: such involvement was a very public proclamation of their adherence to Judaism.

It was sometimes the case that Rothschild wives and daughters were more committed to the faith than their husbands or fathers. Anthony's wife Louisa took her religion most seriously and made a great effort to give her daughters a sound Jewish education. Lionel's wife Charlotte expended a great deal of her energies in finding suitable Jewish husbands for her daughters. She articulated a strong belief amongst family members when she wrote: 'For us Jews, and particularly for us Rothschilds, it is better not to come into contact with other families, as it always leads to unpleasantness and costs money'.¹⁸ Her words reveal that endogamy remained an important part of the Rothschild family's Judaism: the official policy was that family members could not marry outside their faith. Yet there were instances of exceptions to this rule, suggesting that in some cases a steadfast commitment to the Jewish faith could be moderated. Most significantly, as it was the first instance of such an event, Hannah Meyer de Rothschild (1815-1864), daughter of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, married Henry Fitzroy (1807-1859) in 1839, yet she did so only when her father had died, and even then against the wishes of her mother and brothers. Both Constance and Annie de Rothschild (daughters of Anthony) married Christians. This was not surprising considering they rarely met other Jews outside of their own family and all their close friends, with one exception, were Christians. When Annie's marriage was proposed her father Anthony and his brothers assured her that it could not take place. Yet Annie was insistent that it would and the marriage took the form of a registry office ceremony followed by an ecumenical religious ceremony. Neither Annie nor Constance adopted the Christian faith after their marriages and both adhered, at least nominally, to the Jewish faith. Both were buried in Willesden Jewish cemetery with full Jewish rites. Mayer's daughter Hannah de Rothschild also married outside of her faith. Whilst Annie and Constance may have remained committed to their Jewish faith in respect for the memory of their father, Hannah's faith was greater and she was deeply devout: her decision to marry a Christian was one which troubled her greatly. Her marriage to Archibald Primrose, Lord Rosebery (1847-1929) took the form of two ceremonies: a civil

¹⁸ Bermant, *The Cousinhood*, p. 119.

service and another at Christ Church, Piccadilly. This Church of England service caused a certain degree of controversy in light of the fact the bride was still a Jew. Rosebery's mother, the Duchess of Cleveland (d.1891), who disliked Jews and made no secret of her opposition to the marriage, disapproved of the marriage and the ceremony entirely. Hannah remained dedicated to her religion throughout her life and attended services at the Western Synagogue in London on the anniversaries of her parents' deaths. She always fasted and prayed on the Day of Atonement, read the Psalms each day, lit Sabbath candles, and supported many Jewish charities and institutions, as did her cousins.

The social position of the English Rothschild family in the nineteenth century

It was in this climate of Jewish emancipation alongside the ebb and flow of prejudice that the English Rothschild family's financial and political success grew and their social status rose. This achievement was matched by such names as the Cohens, Goldsmids and Sassoons, families who tended to marry amongst themselves and therefore concentrate their wealth and influence within the Jewish community. Nathaniel de Rothschild rose to become England's leading Jew. He eventually received a peerage in 1885 (England's first Jewish Peer) and in 1897 at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee he was chosen to present the Loyal Address of Her Majesty's Jewish Subjects. He became President of the United Synagogue and was highly active in the management and finance of Jewish social institutions. The Rothschild family's position in society was initially based on their financial prowess in the City; they were able to strengthen their position furthermore in the Clubs they frequented and society events they attended. It was from this position that the family were able to become politically influential, offering financial aid and international intelligence to the government of the day: as Michel Clark acknowledges, their 'parliamentary presence was simply a matter of status, a reflection of their wealth and membership of the ruling class'.¹⁹ As this thesis will show, the Rothschild family and certain of their contemporary plutocrats began to imitate the modes of behaviour of the upper-classes, for example acquiring country estates and participating in rural activities. The Rothschild family's political position was further strengthened in this way by their acquisition of land in the Vale of Aylesbury: by 1850 they were the largest single electoral influence in the borough of Buckinghamshire.

¹⁹ Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem*, p. 43.

By the end of the nineteenth century English Rothschild family members moved in the highest social circles, even counting the Prince of Wales (who had become acquainted with Nathaniel at Cambridge University) as a friend. Their membership of the best London Clubs and societies was impressive and included Crockfords, the Garrick, the assembly rooms at Almack's, the Windham Club and Brook's. At Crockfords in particular an endless list of Princes and Peers appeared on the membership list. One writer noted it 'included all the celebrities of England.'²⁰ English Rothschild family members were highly visible society figures and family events were often reported in the society columns of national newspapers: in 1857 for example when Lionel's daughter Leonora de Rothschild (1837-1911) married her French cousin Alphonse James de Rothschild (1827-1905) the occasion was reported in the *Illustrated Times* in three full pages. In 1881 similarly Leopold's marriage to Marie Perugia (1862-1937) featured on the front page of the *Graphic*, and the *Illustrated London News* devoted a full-page picture to it. In attendance at both events were high-ranking aristocratic figures as well as, at the latter occasion, the Prince of Wales as a guest and also a witness (he was the first member of the British royal family to attend a Jewish service). The marriage of Mayer's daughter Hannah in 1878 to the 5th Earl of Rosebery (1847-1829) also appeared in the *Illustrated London News*. The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge attended and the bride was given away by Disraeli. The English Rothschild family certainly entertained fellow Jews in their houses in the Vale of Aylesbury and in London: the names of Montefiore, Goldsmidt, Cohen and Sassoon, amongst others, are to be found frequently in visitors' books. Yet the family also entertained non-Jews at their residences, indeed every Jewish name in the books is matched by that of a non-Jewish friend, political ally or business contact. At Aston Clinton Anthony's wife Louisa 'kept open house' for clergymen of all denominations, perhaps believing men of such a profession the best company for her daughters: Anglican curates, vicars, deans and bishops came often.

Lionel's successful entry into the House of Commons was a great victory for the Rothschild family, as was the fact that his three sons attended Cambridge University, and his eldest son Nathaniel was eventually made a Peer. Jill Allibone goes so far as to suggest that by the end of the century for the Rothschild family 'the doors of society opened wide, they were accepted'. By this time the family were certainly mixing with the

²⁰ Rees Howell Grownow, *Reminiscences* (London: Elder Smith, 1862), vol II, p. 83.

upper echelons of society and considered as powerful and important figures.²¹ This achievement must be seen as even more significant when one considers the family did not abandon their Jewish identity (and still recent German background) in a society where Jewish prejudice and anti-Semitism still lingered.²²

Despite signs of social success and integration the Rothschild family still faced a certain degree of prejudice and uncertainty about their position in the second-half of the nineteenth century. Particularly towards the end of the century as a result of heightened, even hostile, interest in the Anglo-Jewish community, English Rothschild family members were sometimes criticised or at the very least less warmly received in certain circles. Following Mayer's victory in the parliamentary elections for Hythe in 1859 for example the parish church refused to permit the customary bell-ringing. Later in the century Nathaniel's eldest son, Charles de Rothschild (1877-1923), found his time at Harrow School 'somewhat traumatising' owing to 'bullying on account of his religion'.²³ Particularly at the higher echelons of society, and especially in the court circle surrounding Queen Victoria, anti-Semitism was still very present: following the death of Prince Albert in 1861 members of the Rothschild family were consciously excluded from court.²⁴ The Queen's equerry, Arthur Edward Hardinge (1828-1892), declared that the dining tables of the Rothschild family were 'resplendent with the Hebrew gold' and that a member of the Russian royal family who had accepted Rothschild hospitality needed a 'corrective' visit to Westminster Abbey.²⁵ John Spencer, 5th Earl Spencer (1835-1910) advised the Prince and Princess of Wales not to attend a Rothschild ball, noting that 'The Prince ought only to visit those of undoubted position in Society'.²⁶ Thus the Rothschilds' social status was, at least amongst those of the highest class in society, still occasionally in doubt. Of course things were to change after 1901 as the old Victorian court was swept away; indeed the Prince of Wales had been accepting invitations and gifts from the Rothschild family privately for many decades before he became King. English Rothschild family members were no doubt aware of the ambiguous nature of their position in society in the nineteenth century, being neither fully accepted nor entirely rejected by the establishment.

²¹ Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', 80-83.

²² Davis, *The English Rothschilds*, p. 15.

²³ Hannah Rothschild, 'The Butterfly Effect', *Bonhams Magazine*, Spring 2009, 21.

²⁴ Ferguson, *The World's Banker*, p. 772.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

In the early- to mid-nineteenth century when active anti-Semitism seems to have been less visible in British society, several authors (including David Feldman, Tony Kusher, David Cesarani and Bryan Cheyette) have identified an alternative, still-present and distinctive form of hostility: 'the anti-Semitism of tolerance'.²⁷ This theory identifies a 'disabling compulsion among Jews to justify their emancipation and demonstrate that they were worthy British subjects'.²⁸ This allo-Semitism still existed in Britain well into the twentieth century and persisted in setting the Anglo-Jew apart from his fellow Englishman. Certain of the actions of the English Rothschild family in the nineteenth century may have been a result of the existence of such a climate.

Perhaps as a consequence of the persistence of prejudice in some circles, or at best simply tolerance, the Rothschild family strove to be publicly active Englishmen and emphasise their loyalty to the State. Indeed they may have considered their membership of Parliament as essential to their successful assimilation in British society. Their efforts in acquiring country mansions and estates, attending British universities and undertaking civic duties can be explained to some extent if they are considered as part of an attempt by the family to affirm their identity as Englishmen and distance themselves from any cultural differences on account of their faith. Furthermore the choices Rothschild family members made for the architectural style of their houses in the Vale of Aylesbury may have been influenced by their wish to further integrate into British society: in the case of Mentmore House, Aston Clinton House and Ascott House the retention or creation of English architectural features may have been considered an aid in proclaiming a sense of Englishness and assimilation into the landed classes. The family were also sure not to choose architectural styles which made reference to Christianity: for example the Gothic. In addition, as will also be discussed in further detail in later chapters, English Rothschild family members very rarely made reference to their Judaism in their collections of art and equally tended to avoid purchasing items with overt references to Christianity (for example Italian Old Master paintings which featured New Testament subjects).

Finally it appears that the great and swift success of the English Rothschild family in achieving social recognition occasionally worked against them. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries saw a large increase in the number of wealthy Jews joining the

²⁷ Clark, *Albion and Jerusalem*, p. 43.

²⁸ Ibid.

upper ranks of society, largely as a result of the rise in fortunes made in the burgeoning City of London. Ambition amongst these individuals for social advancement or assimilation naturally followed and many were successful in gaining admission to the best Clubs and drawing rooms of the period. As Todd Endelman suggests this was largely as a result of a prevailing climate of 'aristocratic willingness to absorb new wealth whatever its origins'.²⁹ Yet such rapid and rather ostentatious social triumphs, frequently combined with showy, opulent entertainment and displays of wealth, bred resentment, envy and distrust amongst some members of the established aristocracy who saw the admission of Jews into high society as an affront and a sign of 'national denigration'.³⁰ The Duchess of Buccleuch (1811-1895) for example, a resigned opponent of 'the vulgarism and ostentations of the smart set' only once agreed 'to entertain a Jew, whom she did not know, as a special compliment to the Prince of Wales'.³¹

The country estate and 'gentrification'

It was not by chance that by the end of the nineteenth century the Rothschild family were resident in seven sizeable properties in the Vale of Aylesbury. The motivations and opportunities contributing to this outcome were varied. There has been much discussion by historians surrounding the purchase of land in the nineteenth century by men who had established significant personal fortunes following the Industrial Revolution. There are several different interpretations surrounding how readily newly-wealthy men sought to purchase land, as well as their motivations if they did so, and the consequent 'openness' of the upper classes in Britain in the nineteenth century. Various scholars have attempted to establish how much of their fortunes these men spent on socially useful but economically unproductive land, how much access to the landowning classes these men had, and how well they and the old aristocracy intermingled and merged their interests in cultural and social as well as economic spheres.

In order to further uncover the English Rothschild family's exact position in society and their motivations in acquiring or creating country residences, as well as their particular

²⁹ Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000*, p. 146.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ John Vincent, ed., *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay, 1871-1940* (Manchester, 1984), p. 268.

collecting activities, it is necessary to consider matters of wider estate ownership and country house building in the nineteenth century. This will facilitate a discussion as to whether the Rothschild family's actions were typical of nineteenth-century *nouveau-riche* individuals.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, and certainly before railways had begun to spread through the nation, the country house and life of a member of the 'aristocracy' or 'landed-gentry' were much the same as they had long been. A house in the country, perhaps the traditional family seat, would be the centre of a working estate of at least 1,000 acres. The majority of the estate was rented to tenant farmers and employed as agricultural land. This would often provide the estate owner with his entire income, without the need for other employment. The land would also act as hunting or game ground.

Jill Franklin considers that by the mid-nineteenth century, things had begun to change: she suggests in the mid- to late-Victorian period, a new elite infiltrated this traditional arena. She considers that a new entrepreneurial bourgeoisie who had been able to make money in new ways were made socially mobile by their new wealth. Joseph Mordaunt Crook goes so far as to assert that the traditional criteria denoting the upper classes in Britain (i.e. an ancient bloodline, inherited land and aristocratic titles) lessened in significance and that it seemed more possible than ever to buy gentility through the purchase of land. He argues that 'a land owning electorate began to be translated...into a wider property-owning democracy'.³²

H.J. Habakkuk has suggested that many newly-wealthy men now coveted 'admission into the charmed circle of English landed society' and Crook suggests that these '*arriviste*' were likely to be 'mesmerised by an aspirational ideal: the image of the traditional country gentleman', which included a London house, the acquisition of a country seat and an estate.³³ Crook finds these new men (who had made their fortunes in trade, from manufacture and commerce, shipping and the railways, or as solicitors and bankers) now had the financial means to achieve such a dream, and would aspire to do so. Mark Girouard also notes that 'more and more new recruits invested in country estates' in this

³² Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 2.

³³ H. J. Habakkuk, 'The English Land Market in the Eighteenth Century', in *Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. by J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossman (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p. 171; Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 17. Though of course how 'likely' this is has also been disputed by other authors, including Thompson.

period.³⁴ He adds that there was a 'steady increase in the course of the nineteenth century of country houses built by new families.'³⁵ Certain contemporary opinions support this traditional view: in 1881 the Hon. George Brodrick for example observed that 'Men who have made their fortunes in trade are...covetous of land which for them is the one sure passport to social consideration.'³⁶

Thus, as expressed by Franklin, Crook and Habakkuk, the traditional view taken by many historians has been that newly-wealthy men in the nineteenth century were socially mobile, coveting the status of the upper classes through the purchase of land. John Martin Robinson believes that in this period 'ownership of a landed estate gave its proprietors power and influence, economic security, independence, and an established position in society', because, as he suggests, 'from the Middle Ages onwards, ownership of land was the only sure base of power and influence in England, and the only solid long-term investment.'³⁷ It is often supposed that the English Rothschild family belonged to this group of individuals and that their primary motivation in buying land and establishing country residences was this pursuit of status and influence in society, that in this way they were typical of newly-wealthy men of the nineteenth century.

Franklin, Girouard and Crook have also all suggested that the acquisition of a country property by *nouveau-riche* men in this period was often deliberately undertaken with a specific aim and benefit in mind. An American visitor to England, Adam Badeau, wrote in 1886 that 'the wealthiest tradesmen, bankers, brewers, merchants, find their consequences incomplete until they can purchase estates and rank with the country families.'³⁸ Girouard notes that the majority of newly wealthy men were attracted not only to the 'pleasures' but also the 'prestige' of country house ownership.³⁹ According to Crook the often limited size of a *nouveau-riche* property was not a hindrance to the ultimate aim of such men in residing in a country house.⁴⁰ Instead he believes 'it was the imagery that counted. The social imagery of the country house seems to have been irresistible.'⁴¹

³⁴ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 7.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 8 and 85.

³⁶ G. Broderick, *English Land and English Landlords* (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1881), p. 153.

³⁷ John Martin Robinson, 'The Function, Planning and Social Use of the English Country House', in Mary Miers, *The English Country House* (Country Life Magazine, 2009), p. 73.

³⁸ A. Badeau, *Aristocracy in England* (1886), 239; Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 21.

³⁹ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 28.

There has been a good deal of further discussion however regarding this 'gentrification' of the newly-wealthy in the nineteenth century, with many historians disputing the assertions that wealthy businessmen and professionals rapidly and universally purchased land and abandoned their entrepreneurial origins.⁴² W.D. Rubinstein for example presents conclusions which revise the above views and dispute that the Industrial Revolution had a great impact upon the land-owning upper classes and led to great change in the upper echelons of society. Lawrence and Jeanne Stone echo Rubinstein and suggest that social mobility in the nineteenth century from the middle to the upper classes was less possible, and the flow of new money into land much more moderate.⁴³

Rubinstein instead finds that, whilst the number of newly-wealthy men of fortune (in his opinion those who left a personal fortune of at least half a million pounds upon their death) certainly increased from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and even began to surpass the landed portion, there was a general 'reluctance of the post-Industrial Revolution rich to purchase land on a vast scale'.⁴⁴ By 1880 newly-wealthy men were in possession of only 10 per cent of all the greatest estates in England.⁴⁵ Rubinstein concludes that

It is one thing to assert that the purchase of land by the non-landed wealthy was common, another thing entirely to contend that it was universal or even the practice among the majority of wealthy businessmen and professionals.⁴⁶

Rubinstein's evidence suggests that the number of newly-wealthy men of the post-1780 period who purchased land on a large scale was small, either in terms of their total number or the total landed acreage of Britain; fewer still transformed the bulk of their assets into land.⁴⁷ Rubinstein's study of John Bateman's *Great Landowners* of 1883 reveals that no more than 20 out of a total of over 200 great landowners in Britain (those recorded by Bateman as owning 25,000 acres or more) had become millionaires after the Industrial Revolution. In the category of landowners below this (holdings of 10,000-20,000 acres)

⁴² Gentrification defined in this case as the process by which successful businessmen transformed themselves into landowners, or at least embraced aristocratic values, social climbing and the adoption of genteel lifestyles.

⁴³ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁴⁴ W.D. Rubenstein, *Men of Property: The very wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1981), p. 218.

⁴⁵ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Rubenstein, *Men of Property*, p. 213.

⁴⁷ W.D. Rubinstein, *Elites and the Wealthy Modern British History: Essays in Social and Economic History* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987), p.146.

there were only about 35 newly-wealthy individuals out of a total of well over 500 landowners. Rubinstein's research has thrown doubt on the 'near-universal purchase of land by businessmen' in the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

Rubinstein proposes reasons why newly-wealthy men may not have universally sought to purchase land. Firstly agricultural land was not always a wise investment for men of business as it in fact yielded little profit in the nineteenth century. In addition the nature of the business of the *nouveau-riche* man in this period often proved a hurdle to the purchase of land: the family firm or small partnership was the most frequent arrangement, thus investing profit away from the business itself and into land as a personal asset was often difficult. In addition Rubinstein's examination of Bateman's *Great Landowners* makes clear that the fortunes of newly-wealthy men were still no match for those of the old aristocracy, who had often built up their fortunes and land-holdings over many centuries. He concludes that in the nineteenth century

a million pounds, spent entirely on land, would have purchased only about 33,000 acres in much of Britain. For a British businessman, even a Rothschild or a Morrison, to have built up estates matching those of the greatest landed grandees – the 186,397 acres owned by the Duke of Northumberland for example, or the 138,536 acres held by the Duke of Devonshire – would have been quite impossible.⁴⁹

He adds to this explanation by suggesting that few newly-wealthy men had the ready funds to invest in the 'ten thousand acres [which] was probably needed to gain a level of equality with the country elite'.⁵⁰ Finally Rubinstein points towards matters of attitude as an inhibiting factor to the purchase of land. He suggests that the world of the country landowner would have been rather alien and far from attractive to men accustomed to an urban business life.

⁴⁸ Importantly Rubinstein's research also establishes that a disproportionate number of newly-wealthy men of significant fortunes were financiers, rather than industrialists: he shows that families such as the Rothschilds and Barings had made more money than most others: Rubinstein, *Elites and the Wealthy*, p. 145; John Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 4th edn (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971), Appendix I, Table I, p. 495.

⁴⁹ Rubinstein, *Elites and the Wealthy*, p. 159.

⁵⁰ F.M.L Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (London: Fontana, 1988), p. 159.

F.M.L. Thompson has further added to the discussion about the prevalence of 'gentrification' and social mobility in the nineteenth century. Thompson bridges the gap somewhat between the conclusions of historians such as Habakkuk, Crook and Franklin and the revisions of Rubinstein and the Stones. Thompson argues that even if the statistics presented by Rubinstein and the Stones reveal a low rate of entry of the newly-wealthy into the category of landowner, they still provide evidence of some social mobility.⁵¹ Thompson adds that

by no means all successful businessmen sought to set themselves up as landed gentlemen...but fresh applicants for land and status were all the time forthcoming.⁵²

Thompson also argues that previous authors have used too narrow a definition of the 'upper classes' in their studies, he suggests that there was no single 'aristocratic' culture and instead a variety of lifestyles among the nineteenth-century upper classes. The work of Rubinstein and the Stones does suggest that newly-wealthy men were less eager to become great landowners as was once assumed. It is also evident that on the whole, men of relatively new wealth still desired 'residential comfort' and possibly purchased modest amounts of land, thus still entering the lower levels of the landed elite.⁵³ Instead of purchasing vast estates (and appearing in the statistics of Rubinstein and Stone therefore) most newly-wealthy men were content to purchase a lesser estate – perhaps between 2,000 and 10,000 acres.⁵⁴ Some even just desired a few hundred acres, or simply the country house.⁵⁵ The income from any land of this size would be small, and their country house and country living would often still be necessarily supported by business profits. These new men therefore would remain in trade, commerce or manufacture, and act only as part-time country gentlemen, commuting to their place of work when required. Thompson duly notes that a landed way of life, with continued involvement in business, was possible and points to the rise of a plutocracy that successfully fused landed, commercial, and industrial wealth.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Thompson, *English Landed Society*, p. 21.

⁵³ Rubenstein, *Men of Property*, p. 220.

⁵⁴ M. J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 78.

⁵⁵ Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, p. 159.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

Of course it is true that the appreciation of the social and personal benefits a country residence would bring to oneself and one's family drove some men of comparatively 'new money' to consider becoming a 'country gentleman'. At a time when '710 individuals owned one-quarter of England and Wales', land ownership would often be a way for newly-wealthy men to gain further influence, either locally or nationally.⁵⁷ The ownership of a country estate inevitably implied a certain status and asserted one's power and position within the ruling classes. Yet the newly-wealthy might also purchase land for other reasons. For example, though perhaps not yielding great profits, agricultural land was still considered as an alternative investment, away from the risks of business, offering a degree of security for the future as an asset which would not suddenly disappear.

The country house and the *nouveaux riches* in the nineteenth century

In addition certain traditional views as regards the construction of country houses by the newly-wealthy in this period have also been challenged. Some historians have asserted that there was an apparent universality of country house building by the Victorian plutocracy.⁵⁸ In fact the trend for country house building fluctuated over the period and is far from clear-cut. Certainly though, as Franklin notes, 'as the middle classes grew in power and numbers they steadily came to build a higher proportion of the new country houses'.⁵⁹ Franklin estimates that 'well over 1,000, perhaps as many as 2,000 country houses were built between 1836 and 1914'; some of the new owners of these houses were certainly *nouveau-riche* individuals.⁶⁰ Crook believes the number of *nouveau-riche* men acquiring country estates in the nineteenth century was significant.⁶¹ His statistics support this view:

It has been estimated that between 1835 and 1889 about five hundred major country houses were either newly built or substantially rebuilt. Of these, up to half involved 'new' or non-gentry families. In the 1830s hereditary landowners may

⁵⁷ Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 29.

⁵⁸ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, pp. 4-13.

⁵⁹ Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House & its Plan*, p. 24. Though Franklin adds the significant remark 'though owning smaller estates' to this assertion.

⁶⁰ Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 1.

⁶¹ See W. D. Rubinstein, 'Cutting up Rich', in *Economic History Review*, xlv (1992), 354-9; Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, pp.155-163; Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 25; Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 8-9.

have been building three times as many houses as the *nouveau riches*; but by the 1880s, only half as many; then by the 1890s, fewer than a fifth...During the Victorian period as a whole as many as eight out of ten millionaire or half-millionaire families acquired landed estates within two generations; between 1858 and 1879 the proportion is as high as 26 out of 30.⁶²

Ultimately in acquiring country residences, Lionel, his brothers and sons were not unique among *nouveau-riche* individuals of the nineteenth century. Crook identifies copious examples of *nouveau-riche* families acting in just the same way as the Rothschilds in this period. In fact he notes that 'land was a key ingredient in the formation of the *nouveau-riche* identity.'⁶³ Thompson's statistics support this assertion:

it has been estimated that 90 per cent of millionaires – and 50 per cent of half-millionaires – dying before 1880 bought land, and 80 per cent succeeded in founding county families.⁶⁴

Families who had made large fortunes as a result of industrialisation and who now embarked upon the purchase or construction of country residences were numerous and included engineers, manufacturers, railways entrepreneurs and cotton, wool and brewing magnates. They also included several of the Rothschilds' fellow financiers and close business rivals.⁶⁵

It must be remembered however that any prospective estate owner needed to have sufficient funds to purchase a country estate, build or renovate a house and run the estate and house.⁶⁶ As Crook relates, 'Lady Dorothy Nevill recalled that running a town house and country house [including dancing, shooting, hunting] could cost at least £10,000 a year in the 1860s'.⁶⁷ This was in addition to the cost of first building or remodelling a

⁶² See Rubinstein, 'Cutting up Rich', 354-9; Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, pp.155-163; Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 25; Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 8-9.

⁶³ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 16.

⁶⁴ F.M.L Thompson, 'Business and Landed Elites in the Nineteenth Century', in *Landowners, Capitalists and Entrepreneurs: essays for Sir John Habakkuk* (Oxford, 1994), 165.

⁶⁵ For example the Barings family, the Schröders, the Goldsmids as well as individuals such as Henry Drummond, Raikes Currie, Henry Huth, Louis Huth, Bertram Raikes Wodehouse Currie, Sydney Stern, 1st Baron Wandsworth, Alexander Henderson, 1st Baron Faringdon, and Sir Ernest Cassel.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁷ *The Reminiscences of Dorothy Nevill*, ed. by R. Nevill (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), p. 99.

house, which could be substantial.⁶⁸ These houses were often intended as entertainment venues and places in which to impress; they could act as a 'symbol of conspicuous consumption' and the cost of maintaining a suitable lifestyle within them could be formidable. With such costs in mind therefore it is unlikely that estate ownership and country house living was universally undertaken by every newly wealthy man, and such a lifestyle was not desired by all *parvenus*: As Girouard goes on to concede 'not all who had the means took the plunge'.⁶⁹

Whilst Franklin, Girouard and Crook are correct to identify that many *nouveau-riche* individuals acquired land and country properties in this period, it must be remembered that even by 1880 the old and already established landed families of England still owned about 5.7 million acres of land. In fact only about a million or a million and a half acres belonged to men of new money.⁷⁰ Overwhelmingly, landed properties still remained in the hands of families who did not belong to the category of 'newly rich'.⁷¹ In addition established landowners would still build new residences or carry out large additions and alterations to existing houses. Such ventures in fact were often financed from new sources of wealth (for example urban rents or mineral sources).⁷²

The Rothschild family and their country houses in the Vale of Aylesbury

Whilst being a concern for many *nouveaux riches*, that the above benefits of owning a country residence were of considerable interest to the Rothschild family cannot be proven. Franklin has observed that in the nineteenth century 'increasing numbers of manufacturers and businessmen realised it would be both pleasant and practical to live in the country and commute into town'.⁷³ The evidence suggests that this consideration was more contributory to the Rothschilds' decision to reside in the Vale of Aylesbury than any

⁶⁸ Perhaps as much as £10,000 for the minimum sized property.

⁶⁹ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 21.

⁷¹ See Rubinstein, 'Cutting up Rich', 354-9; Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*, pp. 155-163; Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 25; Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, pp. 8-9; *The Spectator*, 23 November 1872, p. 1487 and 26 August 1876, pp. 1076-7.

⁷² For example the rents from Camden Town helped the Marquess of Camden to pay for Bayham Abbey, Sussex, and the 1st Duke of Westminster owned much of Mayfair and Belgravia, the rents from which enabled him to spend over £600,000 on Eaton Hall, Cheshire; Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 24.

⁷³ Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 24.

preoccupation with increased social advantage and 'imagery'. In the case of each of the seven residences examined in this thesis the move to the countryside for the Rothschild family had much more to do with leisure. The family clearly enjoyed country living and the opportunities that the Vale of Aylesbury afforded; away from the noise and pollution of London, in countryside well suited to such pursuits, the brothers and their families could engage in leisure activities and spend time away from their business (and yet still remain within an easily commutable distance). It has also been shown that the properties and estates were employed, perhaps even conceived, as venues in which to entertain in the countryside. Furthermore several Rothschild estate owners of the Vale of Aylesbury were enthusiastic in establishing properties in which their passion for collecting furniture, paintings and *objets d'art* could be indulged.

Yet caution must be employed in generalising too much about the English Rothschild family's motivations in acquiring estates or building houses in the Vale. It has been shown that each of the family members were driven in their actions by individual considerations: each had a different personality and circumstances and their activities in estate ownership and country house construction were unique responses to their individual situations and priorities. The evidence does not overwhelmingly indicate the Rothschild family conceived a premeditated and distinct campaign to dominate the Vale of Aylesbury through the amount of land and influence they possessed. Of course in many cases the acquisition of land was made with investment potential in mind, and that the family did realise the political and social benefits which ownership of land could bring was undoubted: as has been noted Lionel was proactive in acquiring land in the Vale throughout his life when it was offered up for sale, and indeed ensured each of his sons was left with an estate upon his death. Yet in each case the acquisition of land was opportunistic and more often owed to the family's wish to reside near one another in an area they knew well.

Furthermore each country house examined in this thesis had a slightly different emphasis and function. Owing to the particular situations and requirements of their owners, Aston Clinton House, Tring Park House and Ascott House were intended as residences for family and invited guests to enjoy the countryside and countryside activities, as well as dinner and evening entertainments. Mentmore House, in contrast, was built not only for these reasons but also created to hold large parties, and dispense 'corporate hospitality' (reflected in its design and size). Halton House and Waddesdon Manor similarly were

created by their bachelor owners as venues in which to entertain and hold extravagant weekend parties. Furthermore Mentmore House, Halton House and Waddesdon Manor were designed specifically as locations in which to display the esteemed and growing art collections of their owners; this function was less apparent for Aston Clinton House, Tring Park House and Ascott House although it was still a factor in the interior redesign of many rooms in these residences.

The Rothschild family were amongst the most wealthy of newly-rich men of the nineteenth century, yet rather than amassing land on a scale to rival the greatest landowners of Britain they instead purchased enough so as to enjoy a comfortable country lifestyle at the middle to lower end of the land-owning scale. All of the residences the English Rothschild family owned in the Vale of Aylesbury belonged to the tradition of country 'villa', in the same way as Gunnersbury Park. The houses were in some cases large and lavish, but never of vast proportions, and were never, as traditional country houses of the aristocracy were, set at the centre of a considerable agricultural estate. Instead they were quasi-rural homes, close to the City, occupied only seasonally and never for long periods. As has been shown these houses were constructed primarily for pleasure, as venues from which to enjoy family life and country pursuits. The family never severed their connections with business and never substituted it with an income purely from landed estates, despite the acquisition of great wealth and high status from their 'industry'. The example of the income of the Waddesdon estate already cited is revealing here: its revenue was less than a fifth of what it cost to run it.⁷⁴ There is no evidence to suggest English Rothschild family members were motivated by aims of gentrification in their purchase of land and acquisition or creation of large country mansions in this period. Cannadine asserts that 'for all their undeniable grandeur', the English Rothschilds were never 'supine slaves to the culture of gentility'.⁷⁵

The English Rothschild family: unique landowners

The Rothschild family were not unique in their acquisition of country estates and properties. Other families undertook comparable ventures in this period: for example the

⁷⁴ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p.100.

⁷⁵ Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches', 12-23.

Barings, another leading plutocratic family and business rivals of the Rothschild family. The family had also risen from modest beginnings in the eighteenth century to positions of great wealth and prominence by the mid-nineteenth century and had similarly bought, rebuilt, remodeled and expanded several country estates. Among those they purchased or built were Stratton Park, Hampshire in 1801; The Grange, Winchester in 1816; Cromer Hall, Norfolk, in 1829; Norman Court, Salisbury; Membland, Devon, in 1877-9; and finally Banstead Wood, Surrey, in 1884-90.⁷⁶ It is estimated that Alexander Baring, 1st Baron Ashburton (1774-1848), acquired 15,000 acres of Hampshire in the nineteenth century. The haberdasher James Morrison (1789-1857) also serves as a comparable example of a successful *nouveau-riche* individual who expressed his confidence through the acquisition of country properties (he bought Fonthill Pavilion, Wiltshire in 1829 and Basildon Park, Berkshire in 1839): as Dakers notes the Morrisons' 'land, their country houses and their collections of art were the subject of notice' in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷

Yet certain aspects of the Rothschild family's undertakings set them apart from such contemporaries and contribute to their reputation as famous *nouveau-riche* landowners and builders of country houses in the nineteenth century. Whilst it is not possible to say the family were entrepreneurial amongst *nouveaux riches* of this period in the purchase of country estates, they were amongst the earliest groups of newly rich men to attempt such a thing, particularly on such a large scale.

Adding to the perception of the Rothschilds as a unique *nouveau-riche* family in their estate and country house ownership is the fact that often their building ventures in the Vale of Aylesbury were highly visible. The examples of Mentmore House, Halton House and Waddesdon Manor are compelling. In 1907 Thomas H. S. Escott noted that the family's 'dwellings' were 'smart indeed, or rather magnificent'.⁷⁸ Further contributing to the visibility of the family in the Vale was their involvement in the local community and local government, which was energetic and sustained over many generations. Escott further noted that the country houses of the Rothschilds had brought 'fertilising capital into impoverished neighbourhoods...studded them with model farms and...improved dwellings

⁷⁶ Stratton Park acquired by Thomas George Baring, 1st Earl of Northbrook (1826-1904); The Grange acquired by Alexander Baring, 1st Baron Ashburton (1774-1848); Cromer Hall built for Henry Baring (1776-1848); Norman Court built for Thomas Baring (1799-1873); Membland altered for Edward Baring, Lord Revelstoke (1828-1897); and Banstead Wood created for the Hon. Francis Baring (1850-1915).

⁷⁷ Dakers, *A Genius for Money*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Escott, *Society in the Country House*, pp. 472-3.

for a long neglected peasantry.’⁷⁹ He added that the family had ‘given the toiling masses of the country no reason to regret the replacement of old landlords by new’.⁸⁰ Finally, whilst the residences which the Rothschild family founded in the Vale of Aylesbury were not all of one architectural style, family members generally chose to employ the same craftsmen on their different projects. This will be explored further in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury: gentrification

Crook has suggested that the Rothschild family acted in a similar way to many other *nouveaux riches* and aimed for social acceptability through their acquisition of country estates and establishment of country houses. He suggests that like many *nouveau-riche* men of this period, the Rothschilds believed it was possible to ‘buy gentility’ and that the ownership or rental of a country house, whatever its size, brought with it the ‘aura of territorial dominion’.⁸¹ As noted of course it is true that for many *nouveau-riche* families in this period the acquisition of an estate and the purchase or building of a country house could, as Davis suggests, ‘serve as the centre and the symbol’ of power and influence.⁸² Hall adds that ‘land was essential as a basis for political influence’ in this period.⁸³ Yet it has been shown that ‘gentrification’ was not the primary motivation for the Rothschilds’ acquisition of country estates and houses in the Vale of Aylesbury.

Furthermore whilst land was readily available in the Vale of Aylesbury and prices were low, so making it relatively easy for the Rothschilds to build up their estates, Cannadine’s assertion that the family members’ purchases were primarily investments for future sale cannot be firmly supported. The land that the family acquired was not resold in this period and the majority was retained in the family for many generations (eventually sold in the twentieth century only in times of financial crisis or as surplus to requirements). Other motivations, for example the wish to reside near one another on large and contiguous estates providing for future generations, appear more prevalent. After all, if the Rothschild

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 17.

⁸² Davis, *The English Rothschilds*, p. 95.

⁸³ Michael Hall, *Lasting elegance: English country houses, 1830-1900* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2009), p. 100.

family wanted to invest their assets they were more than adept at doing so in the financial arena and must have been aware of the evident and rising high risks involved in investment in agricultural land in this period.

Of course the ownership of country estates and residences benefitted the Rothschild family in more ways than simply as locations for hunting and family leisure time: by the end of the century the wealth and reputation of the Rothschild family was based not only on their influence in the banking world, but also on their ownership of landed estates. By the 1890s the hospitality of the family in the Vale was renowned, and their political influence in the area highly respected. This strong position in both political and social spheres ultimately contributed to some impressive results: that Anthony and Mayer were just the second generation of Rothschilds to live in England makes their appointments as Buckinghamshire Justices of the Peace, Deputy Lieutenants and High Sheriffs even more remarkable. Furthermore their nephews would continue to hold these offices and be a presence in local government.

The family were almost certainly promoting and consolidating their social and political position in British society through the ownership of lands and properties in the Vale. This is evident not only in the fact that the various branches of the family settled in such close proximity, but also in the style of the architecture which they chose for their residences, and the hospitality they provided within them. The various houses in the Vale were undoubtedly settings from which to deliver hospitality and entertainment for relatives, friends and financial, as well as political, contacts: the houses often acted as venues from which the family could offer 'corporate hospitality'.⁸⁴ K.D. Reynolds highlights that in this period

politics and policies were discussed in social and domestic settings, and social events took on political significance as a result of the close-knit, socially cohesive nature of the governing classes.⁸⁵

She further adds, and this is clear in the case of the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury, that 'the country-house party was...for a large part of the year, the site of

⁸⁴ Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches', 12-23.

⁸⁵ K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 155.

political activity...At such parties, politics, sport, and socializing intermingled.¹⁸⁶ Indeed a contemporary, Justin McCarthy, observed in the *Lady's Own Paper* of 1870 that 'social influence is a tremendous power in English politics. The drawing-room often settles the fate of the division in the House of Commons.'¹⁸⁷ The Rothschild family cannot have failed to be aware of this benefit of country house ownership, particularly considering their close friendship with leading figures of society and politics. It is likely that Lionel and his brothers were aware that the establishment of country residences could benefit their social and political position as *nouveau-riche* individuals and desired to become members of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire society as their wealth increased.

The strong social and political position the family enjoyed by the close of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly partly due to the opportunities taken in the early-nineteenth century by the family: the estates which Lionel and his two brothers initially purchased in the 1850s and 60s certainly provided a solid basis for the later country lifestyle they enjoyed. Yet, contrary to some popular views the Rothschild family had not set out upon a deliberate premeditated scheme of gentrification at the beginning of the century, with the intention of masking a foreign and *nouveau-riche* background. In their acquisition of country estates and building of country residences the family members were motivated initially by other reasons which have been identified. The English Rothschild family were not attempting to emulate or transform themselves into aristocracy and dramatically or hastily grasp power and prestige through their activities in the Vale of Aylesbury.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁸⁷ Justin McCarthy, 'The Petticoat in the Politics of England', *Lady's Own Paper*, 9 July 1870, p. 20.

Chapter Four

The English Rothschild Houses of the Vale of Aylesbury

The style of architecture chosen by Rothschild family members for their country mansions is discussed in this chapter. Often architectural preferences for Rothschild mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury were shared between family members. This chapter will discuss these similarities but will also show that the English Rothschild family did not restrict themselves to one style of architecture: their choices were eclectic and dependent upon the preferences, requirements and circumstances of individual family members. The existence of a '*nouveau-riche* style' for architecture in this period is also considered, but it is asserted that general eclecticism in design was more probable. Whether the English Rothschild family were unique in their architectural choices, or followed fashion when building or renovating their mansions will be investigated. The reasons why the family's residences in the Vale of Aylesbury commanded so much attention in this period will also be considered. Finally one of these reasons, that family members invariably employed the same craftsmen in their building projects, will be examined in detail.

The *nouveaux riches* and country house style

No one style for country houses in this period was deemed the most appropriate for a country residence; yet it is clear some were more popular than others, and this varied according to prevailing tastes or fashionable opinion. Styles which rose in popularity throughout the period were the Elizabethan (or Jacobethan), and the Gothic. Both were considered honestly English, and truthful to the vernacular style. The heyday of the Gothic style for country houses was probably between 1855 and 1885; it was not however a style favoured by *nouveau-riche* men. Of course some examples did exist: Pippbrook House, Surrey owned by the ironmaster W.H. Forman; Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil owned by the ironmaster William Crawshay II; and Hornby Castle, Lancashire owned by the worsted manufacturer William Foster I.¹ Yet on the whole the Gothic was employed for country houses built or renovated by older families of pre-industrial wealth (for example Battle Abbey, East Sussex, owned by the 4th Duke of Cleveland; Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, Cardiff, owned by the 3rd Marquess of Bute; and Eaton Hall, Cheshire, built for the 1st Duke

¹ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 40.

of Westminster). The Gothic strongly proclaimed a link to an inherited past of longevity, legitimacy, and 'old money'; it therefore usually both lent itself to the old aristocracy and was avoided by newly wealthy men for the same reason.

The Jacobethan style was the obvious alternative to Gothic for the Englishman who wished to remain suitably patriotic, whilst avoiding any religious comment. After about 1870 the Jacobethan style overtook the Gothic in popularity amongst country house builders and a greater number of *nouveau-riche* individuals employed this style. Examples include Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet at Drayton Manor, Staffordshire; Francis Wright, owner of the Butterley ironworks, at Osmaston Manor, Derbyshire; the stockbroker William Sturdy at Pax Hill Park, Sussex; and of course Mentmore House. This was not however the most popular style chosen by *nouveau-riche* individuals in which to build or transform their country houses. It was used more extensively by the old aristocracy who still favoured a style enforcing a sense of heritage and a shared past: a prominent example is Holker Hall, Lancashire, built for the 7th Duke of Devonshire from 1871. Thus the Jacobethan was not a specifically *nouveau-riche* style. At about this time also the 'Old English' style evolved, rejecting symmetry and taking inspiration from the rambling structures of Tudor England (as seen at Ascott House). It seems the style was encouraged by a trend of returning to conservative and nostalgic values in architecture, as Girouard suggests many country house owners were 'more concerned to preserve their existing heritage than to create new forms.'²

The style chosen most frequently for the country house at the outset of the nineteenth century was the classical; it remained popular throughout the period.³ The majority of country houses built or renovated by *nouveau-riche* individuals in this period were designed in the classical style.⁴ A newly wealthy individual, with the inclination and funds to acquire a country residence of the classical style, could either buy a significant Georgian property, or a minor (or perhaps long neglected) one which could be renovated or

² Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 85.

³ Even if the style occasionally suffered criticism from those who felt it had 'no associations with the English countryside: for example George Gilbert Scott remarked of classical style country houses in 1857 that 'their cold and proud Palladianism, so far from inviting, seems to forbid approach...the only rural thoughts they suggest are of gamekeepers and park rangers': George Gilbert Scott, *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture, Present and Future* (London: John Murray, 1858), p. 147; J. C. Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836)

⁴ As in the case of the Gothic and the Jacobethan however, it must be noted that classicism was not a style exclusively used by *nouveau-riche* builders.

extended. This was the case for example at Aston Clinton House. Alternatively if a wealthy individual desired a classical residence that was created to his own designs, and had a suitable amount of money at his disposal for the task, he might of course commission an entirely new property. One might ask why newly wealthy men, seeking to exhibit their new wealth and confidence, would choose a style which essentially blended in with the existing country house landscape and did not depart from accepted traditions. Yet that it was such a well-established and respected style was precisely why it was employed by those who had only recently acquired country properties and were seeking acceptance. It had worked for the greatest landowners of England (for example the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, Earl Spencer at Althorp or Lord Leconfield at Petworth) so why not for new landowners seeking acceptance by the old aristocracy?⁵ In addition the classical was an obvious alternative to the Gothic, which was much less desirable for newly wealthy individuals due to its overt assertions of lineage, heritage and Christianity. Furthermore classicism could also imply that the patron had European connections and a sense of education and refinement. As highlighted in previous chapters all three motivations were probably a factor in Anthony and Nathaniel de Rothschild's stylistic choices for Aston Clinton House and Tring Park House.

The country house and nineteenth-century French classicism

Though diversity was the main characteristic of the *nouveau-riche* country house style of the nineteenth-century, certain architectural styles stand out as being more popular than others amongst this group. If it is possible to identify a style which was most commonly associated with the *nouveau-riche* builder it is the more exotic development of classicism which occurred in the later part of the century: the French classical-revival style.

Halton House and Waddesdon Manor (and to a certain extent Tring Park House) belonged to the style of country house in this period which Girouard has broadly named *nouveau-riche*. Girouard finds that by the later part of the nineteenth century the estate-owning 'new rich' had grown in confidence and were less likely to want simply to blend-in with their neighbours.⁶ Alfred belonged to this second generation of *nouveau-riche* landowners: men

⁵ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 40.

⁶ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 291.

who had acquired more confidence and wealth by the second-half of the nineteenth century and consequently, as Andrew Adam states 'looked around for something which would shout to the heavens that they had more money and flair than any booby son of a duke or belated earl'.⁷ Frequently the style chosen for the houses they built was one which proclaimed their wealth and celebrated their differences: it was often extravagant and daring.⁸ Adam and Girouard identify the style as one imported from Second Empire France, a 'dashing French Renaissance style direct from the Third Empire of Louis Napoleon, touched up here and there with overtones of Italianate and Byzantine'.⁹ Many examples of this style of country property were built by individuals who had amassed post-industrial fortunes. Crook states that

of the 200 men who left more than a million pounds between the 1820s and the 1920s the great majority – particularly those with new money – proved extraordinarily obtuse in their choice of either the classical or French classical style for a country residence.¹⁰

Girouard acknowledges that this 'revived French Renaissance style' had been present in England before it became associated with the *nouveaux riches* in the nineteenth century.¹¹ This 'château-style' was not unique to Halton, and perhaps not even unusual: there was a prevailing atmosphere of eclecticism in architecture generally by the 1870s. The *dix-huitième* style had already inspired such residences as Wrest Park, Bedfordshire (1834-9) built for the 2nd Earl de Grey, Oxonhoath, Kent (1846-7) built for Sir William Richard Powlett Geary, 3rd Baronet, Bedgebury, Kent (1854-5) built for Sir Alexander Beresford Hope and Wynnstay in Denbighshire built for Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 3rd Baronet. However these houses of the early-nineteenth century were built largely for well-established landowners and the style was not generally reported as extraordinary. Thus at this time the French Renaissance style was not recognised as specifically *nouveau-riche*; according to Girouard it appealed to many at this time because the 'Victorians had become increasingly conscious of skyline, and attracted by buildings with a lively silhouette'.¹²

⁷ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 31.

⁸ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 291.

⁹ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 31.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 75.

¹¹ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 291.

¹² Ibid, p. 293.

As the century progressed many grand new London hotels of the 1860s began to adopt this French style (for example the Great Western Hotel, Paddington; the Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria; the London Bridge Hotel; Westminster Palace Hotel; and the Charing Cross Hotel). These hotels provided the 'latest refinements in luxury and technology to a predominantly middle-class clientele', and Girouard argues that when the *nouveau-riche* of industry or commerce began to purchase landed estates and build country houses in the latter-half of the nineteenth century many wished to emulate the opulence and confidence of these hotels in their own residences.¹³

As the French Renaissance style became increasingly associated with those made newly rich from commerce or industry, it followed that the older families gradually abandoned it, arguing that it was not suitably 'English'. Indeed the old aristocracy seemed to actively distance itself from the style as the century progressed. Possibly as a result of their depreciating fortunes such individuals found it increasingly difficult to follow new fashions, and so perhaps rationalised their reluctance to employ the style by dismissing it as showy and arrogant. Thus Girouard asserts that by the 1870s 'full blown French Renaissance was left to the enjoyment of parvenus'.¹⁴ Many more country houses built in this style now followed, commissioned by men who had been made newly rich in this period. Examples included Normanhurst, Surrey (1867) built for Thomas Brassey, son of a great railway contractor; Cobham Park, Surrey (1873) built for the brewer C. J. F. Combe; Shabden House, Surrey (1870) built for city merchant John Cattley; Wykehurst, Sussex (1871-4) built for merchant banker Henry Huth; and Wartner Priory, Yorkshire, (1878) built for Charles Henry Wilson, 1st Baron Nunburnholme of the Hull shipping family. Thus neither Halton House nor Waddesdon Manor were unique in *nouveau-riche* architectural fashions. In opting for French classicism Alfred and Ferdinand de Rothschild endorsed the most popular and accepted choice for *nouveau-riche* architecture in this period.

Crook concludes that the most likely explanation for such a trend is that the purchase of Georgian mansions and the replication of French chateaux 'ensured acceptance'.¹⁵ Yet it is unlikely this is true for the latter style as it was not indigenous and as noted the established aristocracy tended to reject and criticise it. Instead Crook's second suggestion, that the French Renaissance style 'indicated social success' is more likely. The Rothschild

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 294.

¹⁵ Ibid.

examples of Halton House and Waddesdon Manor presented in this thesis support such an explanation. These residences were two of the most lavish examples of the French classical style of the nineteenth century: both were exuberant, frivolous and underlined the wealth and confidence of their owners. It is likely that it was this visible confidence and sense of prosperity which endeared the style to the *nouveaux riches* of this period.

Whilst the French Renaissance-revival style remained popular for such clients in the 1870s, by the 1880s it had fallen from favour in England. It was for example discredited in certain works of popular literature: Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* aided in the style being associated with dangerous Victorian extravagance and the damaging worldliness of financiers. The dramatic downfall of the famous financier Baron Albert Grant and the demolition of his unfinished French-style Kensington mansion in 1883 as a result of his bankruptcy also acted to discourage further lavish ventures in such a style.¹⁶

The Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury: architectural style

Of the seven Rothschild residences in the Vale of Aylesbury only Halton House and Waddesdon Manor were built in the 'chateau-style'. Even so Crook has identified this style and these two houses as 'characteristically Rothschildish'.¹⁷ Such a narrow definition is at best misleading: the French classical-revival style has often been wrongly identified as the dominant Rothschild style of architecture in the Vale of Aylesbury. In fact no one model of house was favoured by the Rothschild family for their residences. Each was constructed in a different architectural style, drawing on influences ranging from the Elizabethan era, the English classical period, the French Renaissance, and the growing fashion for cottage-style houses. Girouard observes of the *nouveau-riche* landowner that

if no country house property was available an estate had to be built up from scratch, and a completely new house built. Even if the property came complete with a house, it often seemed too modest or old fashioned to its new proprietors;

¹⁶ The French Renaissance-revival style did however retain its potency after this period in America, where it further flourished. Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 302.

¹⁷ Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches*, p. 64.

and a grand new mansion, with generous entertainments for the neighbours held within it, was a useful means of accelerating acceptance by the county.¹⁸

Both scenarios indicated by Girouard were played out by the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury in the nineteenth century.

Each Rothschild builder had a different style and vision for their residence, and each resolved on a distinct architectural edifice to achieve this. A diversity of functions resulted in a diversity of appropriate styles. The first property to be constructed, Mentmore House, certainly made a statement: Davis believes through building this large house Mayer 'marked his arrival into country society in the traditional manner...to serve as both the centre and the symbol of his power and influence'.¹⁹ For the rest of the family it was difficult to compete with this grand new mansion and so perhaps this is why Anthony at Aston Clinton and Nathaniel at Tring did not even try: instead they altered and enlarged existing houses, improving them for their needs. The same was true of Ascott House. These residences were never as splendid in style as Mentmore House.

Through their positions as estate and country house owners Rothschild family members were expressing their aim to be accepted by the land owning class of a nation into which they themselves had settled only relatively recently, and to further integrate themselves into it. At Mentmore House and Ascott House Mayer and Leopold de Rothschild revealed a wish to endorse the vernacular and create residences in particularly English styles of architecture. Similarly at Aston Clinton House and Tring Park House the original English character of each was retained, so as to avoid breaking with the past and making an overt statement of 'otherness' (the latter more extensively in its interior than exterior).

In addition the Rothschild family's choice of architectural style in their country houses changed over time. The founder of the English Rothschild bank, Nathan Mayer, had not commissioned large building projects and instead preferred to purchase and remodel a modest older residence (Gunnersbury Park). His sons Anthony and Mayer, whilst gaining some confidence and acquiring land further from London in the Vale of Aylesbury, opted to create residences which complemented and endorsed existing vernacular architectural

¹⁸ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 7.

¹⁹ Davis, *The English Rothschilds*, p. 94.

styles, in the case of the latter merely renovating an older structure. Yet by the third generation of English Rothschilds, the family members were deeply involved in the social and political life of the Vale and the nation. This secure position must have influenced their architectural decisions: they could be bolder in their architectural choices, perhaps as a means to affirm their status.²⁰ Tring Park House went some way towards this in the French details of its exterior, but it was Halton House and Waddesdon Manor which reveal this tendency most strongly.

Furthermore the Rothschild family were not unique in their choices of architectural style for their residences in the Vale of Aylesbury. Indeed they were not even leaders of fashion. As individuals they were not noteworthy, yet it is the fact that they established seven substantial mansions within a radius of 15 miles which sets them apart from other *nouveau-riche* families. In addition their residences were often more showy and more affluent than those of their contemporaries. The extravagance evident in the exteriors of several of the Rothschild residences was largely due to the extreme wealth of their owners; each builder could afford to experiment with 'original and eclectic tastes in architecture and interior decoration'.²¹ Finally the 'style' for which the family is remembered should not be considered as the architecture of their country houses alone: instead it was a combination of both exterior and interior presentation.

Eclecticism in architecture was common in the nineteenth century, particularly in the last few decades. Whilst certain styles of architecture prevalent in this period have been considered as *nouveau-riche* (for example French classicism) this is too simplistic a view: in fact the *nouveaux riches* were as wide-ranging in their architectural choices as the established upper classes in this period. The idea that all *nouveaux riches* of this period deliberately chose alternative and outstanding architectural styles for their country houses is incompatible with the concept that they acquired or built such residences to achieve assimilation with the existing landed classes. This argument is highlighted through the example of the Rothschild family. There were various factors which might have affected the architectural choices of any *nouveau-riche* individual in this period, not simply their background as *parvenu*. These included for example an interest in the historical, continental connections or upbringing, a desire to be associated with a particular political

²⁰ Pauline Prevost-Marcilhacy, *Les Rothschilds: Bâtisseurs Et Mécènes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), p. 249.

²¹ *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, pp. 473-475

or religious sensibility, and the wish to create a flamboyant residence or one that kept up with the latest fashions. Such considerations certainly played a part in the Rothschild family's architectural choices, and reflected the family's position in society and aims or ambitions in this area.

The Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury: shared craftsmen

Whilst the residences which the Rothschild family founded in the Vale of Aylesbury were not all of one architectural style, family members generally chose to employ the same craftsmen for their projects in the nineteenth century. This tendency to share architects and builders is perhaps another reason why the English Rothschild family's building activities were so noteworthy. The names of Sir Joseph Paxton, George Stokes, George Devey, George Myers and the firm William Cubitt & Co. appear frequently in relation to the design and building of the seven mansions. This further reveals close links and contact and the evident sharing of ideas or opinions between family members and their tendency to rely on a limited group of craftsmen for their projects.

Sir Joseph Paxton (1803-1865) and George Stokes (1827-1874)

Mayer was the first of the Rothschild family to employ Sir Joseph Paxton as the architect for his mansion in the Vale of Aylesbury. The choice was a curious one: Paxton was not known for his domestic work, and at the time he was engaged by Mayer for Mentmore he had not yet achieved the national fame which he would later enjoy. Paxton came from humble beginnings: he started his career as a garden boy at the age of 15 at Battlesden Park, Bedfordshire. After several other positions he obtained a post as gardener in 1823 at the Horticultural Society's Chiswick Gardens. This lay close to the gardens of the 6th Duke of Devonshire at Chiswick House, and the Duke frequently met the young gardener. Being impressed with his skill and enthusiasm, the Duke offered Paxton the position of Head Gardener at Chatsworth in 1826. Here from the early 1830s Paxton was engaged in design and building work for the Duke: he is perhaps best remembered at Chatsworth for his glass houses or conservatories which earned him recognition as an innovative architect and were the structural forerunners for his later glass commissions. Paxton later came to enjoy national fame with his designs for the building that would house the Great

Exhibition, which opened in May 1851. This epoch-making 'Crystal Palace', hailed as a miracle of glass and iron, earned Paxton the name 'the new Christopher Wren' and a knighthood in October 1851. By the end of his life Paxton was acknowledged as an author, editor, engineer, designer and innovative architect.



Figure 51: Sir Joseph Paxton

Paxton is likely to have been awarded the commission for Mentmore House sometime before November 1850 as in that month he delivered a paper to the Royal Society of Arts in which he mentioned a gentleman's house 'covered wholly with glass' that he was working on.²² This was probably Mentmore. Mayer had therefore engaged Paxton for Mentmore before his fame had gathered full momentum: Paxton's plans for the Great Exhibition building had only been accepted in July 1850 and construction of the building did not commence until 1851.²³ Though primarily known as the architect of glass conservatories, Paxton was clearly able to undertake domestic commissions: at the time Mayer hired him these had included the rebuilding of the village of Edensor, Derbyshire, for the 6th Duke of Devonshire in around 1838-42, and the building of the Elizabethan style Burton Closes Hall, Bakewell, for the banker and stockbroker John Allcard in 1846.

²² A transcript of his paper can be found at the Royal Society of Arts Archive in a volume entitled *Proceedings of the Society; First Ordinary Meeting*, 13 November 1850.

²³ Indeed the contract for the construction of Mentmore House reveals a moment of Paxton's elevation in status: it details that the house was to be built according to the plans prepared by 'Sir Joseph Paxton of Chatsworth', and shows that the designation 'Sir' was added by the clerk after the document had originally been composed. RAL, 000/848/16, The Baron M. A. Rothschild and Mr G.E.O. Myers: Copy contract for the erection of a mansion at Mentmore, 24 October 1851.

The decision to hire Paxton was Mayer's, though it is not known exactly how they first met. The earliest mention by Paxton of the Rothschild family in his personal correspondence is November 1850, when he wrote to his wife Sarah: 'I find I cannot leave London before the 5 o'clock train on Wednesday. I am off to the Rothschilds early in the morning'.²⁴ In 1841 Mayer's mother, Hannah had made a tour of the Midlands, northern England and Scotland. On this tour she visited Derbyshire and Chatsworth.²⁵ In letters to her sons Lionel and Mayer she noted that of all the estates she had seen during her trip, Chatsworth was the one which expressed most 'ingenuity and taste'; she continued with praise remarking 'no expense, talent or trouble is deficient...' and commented that Paxton's new Great Conservatory was 'marvelous and very scientific'.²⁶ This resounding endorsement of Paxton's work given to Mayer by his mother therefore may have induced him to consider the architect for Mentmore.

In addition it is possible Paxton was introduced to the Rothschilds by the 6th Duke of Devonshire who was known by the family.²⁷ In 1845 the Duke enjoyed the hospitality of James de Rothschild (1792-1868), Mayer's uncle, in Paris at a large dinner at which Anthony, Mayer's elder brother, was also present.²⁸ We might wonder if the subject of Paxton was raised at such a dinner, particularly as he had just completed the enormous Emperor Fountain and Emperor Lake, as well as the innovative Great Conservatory, at Chatsworth. Whether or not the Duke of Devonshire had mentioned his architect Paxton to the Rothschild family, the design and building work Paxton had carried out at Chatsworth and the nearby village of Edensor was undoubtedly generally known in society (particularly following the famous construction of the Great Conservatory at Chatsworth and Victoria Regia House).²⁹ The Queen's visit to Chatsworth in December 1843 for example was widely reported in the national and local press and his Great Conservatory mentioned frequently.

²⁴ Chatsworth Archive Devonshire Collections, Correspondence and Papers of Sir Joseph Paxton, 640, Joseph Paxton, London to Sarah Paxton, Chatsworth, 26 November 1850.

²⁵ Accompanied by her youngest daughter Louise de Rothschild (1820-1894).

²⁶ RAL, 000/10/5, Hannah Rothschild to Charlotte de Rothschild, York, 5 October 1841.

²⁷ Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 300.

²⁸ RAL, XI/109/52A/2/102, Anthony de Rothschild, Paris, to his brothers, 15 May 1845.

²⁹ The Great Conservatory or Stove was a huge cast-iron heated glasshouse. At the time it was constructed (1837) it was the largest glass building in the world. The largest sheet glass available at that time were only three feet long but Paxton managed to procure the services of Robert Chance, of the West-Midlands based glassworks Chance Brothers and Company, who produced four foot sheets for the project.

Another possibility is that Mayer met Paxton in the course of his duties serving on the committee for the Great Exhibition.³⁰ Mayer loaned certain *objets d'art* to the Great Exhibition when it opened in 1851 and was highly involved in the project at many stages.³¹ Some authors have also suggested it was through his work on the railway that Paxton had been introduced to the family, and that the architect and the Rothschilds had known each other for close to a decade by the time of Mentmore's commission.³² Representing the Duke of Devonshire, Paxton had sat on the Board of Directors of the Midland Railway from 1848 onwards. Certainly for this generation of English Rothschilds there was no distinction between their private lives and business dealings and it is possible Mayer met Paxton in this capacity.

Paxton was joined in the commission by his son-in-law George Stokes who had previously worked with George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). He was promoted quickly in Paxton's architectural practice and awarded increasingly greater levels of responsibility.³³ Being chosen as Mayer's architect proved to be an enormous professional advantage for Paxton: he became widely known as the architect for the family and was often recognized as such by the public. Paxton and Stokes received many other commissions from the English, French and Italian branches of the family. The family had a tendency to share favoured professionals, regardless of their nationality. Paxton was also engaged as the architect by Anthony at Aston Clinton House for example: however although Paxton had won the commission it was in reality supervised by Stokes. One of the most high-profile commissions Paxton and Stokes undertook for the Rothschild family was for James de Rothschild (1792-1868), Mayer's uncle. James was highly competitive and after being shown the plans for Mentmore was inspired to replicate the house on his own estate in France at Ferrières. Embroiled in a rivalry with his English nephews he requested a house

³⁰ His brother Lionel de Rothschild also served as one of the trustees to the Royal Commission funds for the Great Exhibition.

³¹ See a congratulatory certificate from 'Her Majesty's Commissioners to Baron Mayer de Rothschild for his contribution admitted in the class of Sculpture in Metal', in RAL, 000/109/21, Charlotte Photograph Album.

³² Pauline Prevost-Marcilhacy, 'Rothschild Architecture in England, France, Austria and Italy', in *The Rothschilds: Essays on the History of a European Family*, ed. by Georg Heuberger (Frankfurt: Thorbecke/Boydell and Brewer, 1994), pp. 245-264.

³³ Chatsworth Archive Devonshire Collections, Correspondence and papers of Sir Joseph Paxton, Sir Joseph Paxton, London to Sarah Paxton, Chatsworth, 18 March 1861. In this letter Paxton visits a Mr Knatchbull-Hugessen's house near Ashford with Mr Scott, who was 'Stokes' old master'.

'like Mentmore only much larger'. The house was duly designed and constructed in 1854-59.³⁴



Figure 52: James Mayer de Rothschild, c. 1740s



Figure 53: Joseph Paxton, View of Château Ferrières front and west facades, dated 24 June 1854, Watercolour (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, les Haras d'Estimauville* [Paris: Christie's, 26-27 October 2010])

³⁴ Paxton's letters reveal he began regular trips to Paris and Ferrières in 1854 and up until 1858, See Chatsworth Archive Devonshire Collections, Correspondence and Papers of Sir Joseph Paxton, 854, 875, 952, 1037, 1037, 1090, 1340, 1393, 1398, 1399.

George Myers (1803-1876)

As the architectural profession of the nineteenth century grew increasingly organised and formal, so did the building profession.³⁵ Country houses of the nineteenth century were planned and built in an increasingly formalized and professional way. Girouard has found that

more and more Victorian country houses were put into the hands of one of the big London builders (instead of employing small separate contracts and direct local labour) –in particular William Cubitt and Son, George Myers and Trollope and Sons.³⁶

Following this trend Mayer chose to entrust the construction of his new house at Mentmore to one such builder. George Myers was engaged to execute the plans drawn by Paxton and Stokes. Myers had been apprenticed at the age of 13 as a stone mason at Beverley Minster, Yorkshire. In the 1830s Myers undertook several commissions for new mills and factories, as well as restoration of churches in the Hull area. By 1837 he had met the great A.W.N. Pugin (1812-1852) and would continue to work with the architect on various contracts for the rest of his life.³⁷ By 1845 Myers had followed Pugin to London, and established a wharf and yards on the Pedlar's Acre Estate in Lambeth.

In 1850 Pugin and his craftsmen were amongst those asked to exhibit their 'skills and artistry' at the Great Exhibition.³⁸ Myers won a medal for his exhibits and it was advertised that the work had been executed in his workshops. Myers' business flourished following this exposure and by the 1850s he had executed a diverse variety of buildings, including churches, mansions and houses, ballrooms, picture galleries, conservatories, warehouses, docks and even railways.³⁹

³⁵ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁷ Pugin is now best remembered for his work in the Gothic Revival style, particularly churches and the Palace of Westminster, as well as the decoration and furnishing of the Houses of Parliament. He is often known as 'Pugin's Builder'.

³⁸ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, pp. 39 and 45. Myers exhibited a canopied tomb with effigy, four carved panels, reredos and altar, a stone tabernacle, a Great Rood, an oak screen for a church, a stone altar, a stone fireplace, an oak cabinet and a copper casement. Most of the objects chosen had been designed for particular churches or residences.

³⁹ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 46. In fact he had ordered 10,000 business cards for the occasion.



Figure 54: George Myers (Spencer-Silver, *Pugin's Builder*)

Like Paxton, Myers was also engaged in other projects for the Rothschild family following Mentmore's construction: Mayer paid Myers to travel to his residence in Newmarket in order to 'take dimensions for proposed alterations etc.'⁴⁰ Myers was also employed by Lionel to alter, improve and extend Gunnersbury Park from the late 1850s, as well as his London residence.⁴¹ Between 1860 and 1870 Lionel paid Messrs Myers & Sons well over £170,000. This was an enormous sum, enough to build several houses, but it is difficult to discover from the ledgers exactly what work was done as only names and dates are recorded.⁴² In addition Anthony engaged Myers to convert his property at Aston Clinton House. He is also likely to have been commissioned as the builder for the renovations at Tring Park House carried out by Nathaniel. Further afield Myers was also employed alongside Paxton in the construction of Ferrières for James de Rothschild. Patricia Spencer-Silver has estimated that by 1873 the Rothschild family 'had paid Myers some £350,000 for building work', a vast sum.⁴³

⁴⁰ He was paid £4.15s.0d: Jill Allibone, *George Devey: Architect, 1820-1886* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1991), p. 158.

⁴¹ Allibone, *George Devey*, pp. 56, 167.

⁴² RAL, XI/2/0 and XII/41/1, George Myers accounts 1850-1879.

⁴³ Perhaps around £15 million today: Patricia Spencer-Silver, *Pugin's Builder: the life and work of George Myers*, (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1993), pp. 78, 86, 173.

George Devey (1820-1886)

By the mid-1870s George Devey was a leading architect of domestic buildings and had developed a style of his own: he has been seen as the forerunner of the 'Old English' Vernacular revival.⁴⁴ Devey's particular style was well received at a time when the high Victorian Gothic style of architecture was waning and some patrons desired a more relaxed and secular style of architecture. He was one of first architects of this period to abandon Gothic and classical revivalism and instead design buildings in a more traditional, vernacular style.⁴⁵ He often used tiles and timbers on external walls, which recalled styles of earlier periods, but never adhered strictly to any historical architectural rules. Devey's houses often appeared rambling and unplanned, suggesting structures which had developed slowly over centuries as if by accident.⁴⁶

In this style Devey's work preceded that of Richard Norman Shaw, William Eden Nesfield and Philip Webb: these men would follow Devey's example and champion a style they called 'Old English'. This style was connected with the Victorian interest in heritage and the 'Olden Time' which will be discussed in relation to Mentmore House later in this thesis (Chapter Eight). Nostalgia for 'Old England' and desire for a return to preindustrial values drove certain architects and patrons towards a 'smaller-scale, more domestic, a simpler and more wholesome version of the Olden Time'.⁴⁷ Houses designed by architects influenced by this trend often idealised rural England. In much the same way as Devey they produced asymmetrical and apparently unplanned structures incorporating black and white motifs, tile-hangings, half-timbering, multiple chimneys and gables varying in height.⁴⁸ Franklin is correct in supposing that this 'Old English' style was 'perfectly suited to the new clientele who needed a house in the country rather than a country house', most especially the *nouveau-riche* individual.⁴⁹ Such a conclusion is particularly relevant to Leopold and Ascott House, which was utilised predominantly as a rural retreat and hunting lodge.

⁴⁴ Ascott, *Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Robinson, p. 4

⁴⁵ Devey pioneered his 'Old English' style in his work for Lord de L'Isle on the Penshurst estate, Kent in the late 1840s: Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven; London: Yale, 1997), p. 22; Jill Allibone, 'Not Just Grand Mansions: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', *Country Life*, 183 (February 1989), 80-83.

⁴⁶ Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and its Plan, 1835-1914*, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Miers, *The English Country House*, p. 26; Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*, p. 133.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and its Plan*, p. 12.

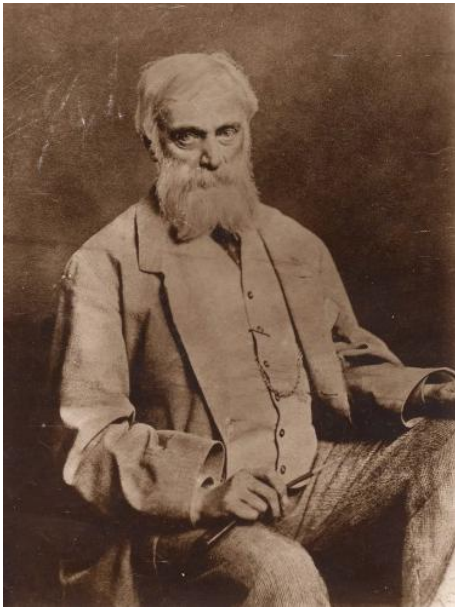


Figure 55: George Devey (RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

After 1872 Devey was engaged to design various buildings lying on the Aston Clinton estate including cottages, the West Lodge stables, and new park gates. Upon being discovered and employed by the Rothschild family Devey was provided with a great deal of work in the Vale of Aylesbury. At Mentmore he was employed to design several estate buildings which were generally marked by varied rooflines and the impression that the buildings had been extended over a number of generations. This gave a sense of Englishness and of an established heritage to the estate, which appealed to the Rothschild family.⁵⁰ It is also possible that Devey guided the alterations of Tring Park House in the 1880s, although this cannot be confirmed with certainty.⁵¹ Leopold also chose Devey to oversee the enlargement of his residence at Ascott.

Devey was not universally known and did not seek the publicity or fame that some other architects of the time enjoyed: he generally gained commissions from aristocrats and rich bankers through recommendation alone.⁵² In the mid 1860s Devey had been commissioned by several Liberal landowners to renovate estate buildings or remodel old houses, and by the 1870s was designing new residences. Perhaps it was through such associations that he came to be recommended to the Rothschild family. In addition

⁵⁰ Kennedy, 'The success of excess: aspects of Englishness in some of the Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury', p. 74.

⁵¹ See Chapter Eleven for further details on Devey's work here.

⁵² Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 83.

Anthony may have been introduced to Devey by the vicar of the nearby village of Buckland, Edward Bonus, who was often invited to Aston Clinton. Bonus had employed Devey to construct a new school in Buckland, repair the church of All Saints and design various other buildings and cottages in the village.

William Rogers (dates unknown)

William Rogers (or Rodriguez) was an architect at the London firm William Cubitt & Co. He was first employed by Leopold to remodel his London residence at 5 Hamilton Place in the late 1870s. Alfred may have seen the work which Rogers had carried out for his younger brother and this may have been why he also decided to employ him to construct Halton House in the 1880s. It is also possible that, knowing of the work for his brothers, Nathaniel commissioned Rogers to draw up proposals for the alterations at Tring Park in the 1880s. It is not known for certain if he was the architect chosen for the final project, but the alterations he devised are largely those which were executed. At Ascott for Leopold in the 1880s the building firm chosen was also 'Messrs. Cubitt & Co.'⁵³

The Cubitt firm had been established in 1827 by Thomas (1788-1855), William (1791-1863) and Lewis Cubitt (1799-1883). The firm's major early commissions included the London Institution, Lord Calthorpe's estate in Bloomsbury and the Bedford, Southampton, Grosvenor and Lowndes estates in London.⁵⁴ By the 1840s the firm's main business was large London houses (for example the Piccadilly residence of Henry Hope as well as Dorchester and Hertford House). Upon the death of William Cubitt in 1863 the business was continued in his name by two partners, a Mr Plucknett (who attended to the building side) and William R. Rogers (born Rodriguez, who was responsible for the design side of the business). The Rothschild family's association with Rogers can also be identified from the guest book at Mentmore House where a William Rogers is recorded on several occasions in the 1870s.⁵⁵

⁵³ 'Ascott House, Leighton Buzzard', *The Builder*, LV (1888), 386.

⁵⁴ The firm was originally known as T, W & L Cubitt or simply Messrs Cubitts. In 1827 however Thomas Cubitt left the firm to establish his own business, thus the firm William Cubitt & Co. was formed at this date.

⁵⁵ William Rogers is recorded in the guest book of Mentmore House on 10 December 1871, 9 June 1876, March 1879 and also in the guest book of the Mentmore Stud in 1874, May and July 1878 and December 1879: Dalmeny House Archive, Mentmore House Guest books, 1871-1879.

The Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury: comfort and new technology

In addition to sharing the same architects and builders a trait that many of the Rothschild mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury shared was their use of innovative technology. This enabled family members to ensure their houses were comfortable and luxurious, and impressed a sense of affluence and modern-style living on any guests.

Mentmore House

Mentmore House was highly notable for its use of modern technology. The development by Paxton of his ridge-and-furrow roof technique for the ceiling of the Grand Hall seems to have been as a result of a series of experiments with horticultural buildings on which he had been working since 1828. His experiments culminated in the Great Conservatory at Chatsworth of 1837. For this building sheet-glass was first made in a length of four feet, nothing beyond three feet having ever before been made.⁵⁶ Paxton soon turned his design ideas in this area to domestic use, employing his ridge-and-furrow roof in 1840 for a conservatory at Darley Dale, Derbyshire. It was so successful that the owner of the property informed Paxton that it was used as a sitting-room by his family.⁵⁷ Paxton summed up his ambitions for his new technology in a speech to the Royal Society of Arts in 1850 in which he also mentioned Mentmore, 'a gentleman's house, to be covered wholly with glass':

When I consider the cheapness of glass and cast iron, and the great facility with which it can be used, I have no doubt but many structures similar to that at Darley will be attached to dwelling-houses, where they may serve as sitting-rooms, conservatories, waiting-rooms, or omnibus-rooms, if I may be allowed that expression. I am now, in fact, engaged in making the design for a gentleman's house, to be covered wholly with glass; and when we consider that wherever lead is now used, glass may, with equal propriety, be substituted, I have every hope that it will be used for buildings of various conditions and character. Structures of this kind are also susceptible to the highest kind of ornamentation in stained glass and general painting. I am not without hope, however, that it will become almost

⁵⁶ Royal Society of Arts, London, *Proceedings of the Society: First Ordinary Meeting*, 13 November 1850.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

universal in its use. In short, there is no limit to the uses to which this material may be applied – no foresight can define the limits where it will end.⁵⁸



Figure 56: Mentmore House, Roof of Grand Hall, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Certain other features of Mentmore House were notable for their advanced nature: many required the use of less traditional materials that were beginning to be developed in this period.⁵⁹ These recognizably mid-nineteenth century new technologies included fashionable plate-glass panels: Paxton set such panels (nearly twenty feet in height) with Indian rubber into copper and walnut frames in three arches which lay between the entrance vestibule and the Grand Hall: the central arch formed a door.⁶⁰ This plate glass, manufactured in 1855, was the largest ever produced up to that date.

The Builder of 1857 noted that Mentmore House was ‘warmed throughout by hot-water pipes and provision is made for ventilating each room, by the admission of fresh, and the removal of vitiated air.’⁶¹ This hot-water heating and artificial ventilation system was equally as unusual and ahead of the times as the glazed Grand Hall.⁶² Mentmore was one of the earliest houses to have a hot water under-floor and central heating system.⁶³ Hot and cold running water was provided to all the bathrooms, as were flush lavatories.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ CBS, D/HJ/6/27, George Myers Summary Account, 31 December 1855.

⁶¹ ‘Mentmore’, *The Builder*, XV (Dec 19 1857), 738-40.

⁶² *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p.8.

⁶³ CBS, D/RO/4/35 and 36, Plans of Mentmore Mansion; NMR, Buildings File, Listing for Mentmore Towers, 1975. However, this did not mean that the house was not provided with open fires and elaborate fireplaces, which remained the traditional focus of any room.

Tring Park House

Tring Park House also boasted the innovative use of several new technologies. For example in similar style to the Entrance Hall at Mentmore House the entrance to the Morning Room at Tring was framed with three tall arches filled with plate glass, a technology which had only become available in the 1830s and 40s. The house also boasted recent advances in heating, lighting and plumbing: under-floor heating was provided to the majority of rooms and electricity was provided from the silk mill within the grounds which had been converted into a power generator. In addition a hydraulic lift was added to the service wing to deliver food from the kitchens in the basement to the main part of the house.

Halton House

Alfred's wish to show his lavish tastes and personality extended to installing the latest technological advances in heating, water supply and glass in his country mansion. He used the flourishing new technology of plate glass to great effect, in a very similar way to his uncle Mayer at Mentmore, by installing large skylights overhead in many rooms - two for the Salon and Grand Staircase, one above the porch and as many as eleven for the Winter Garden. Large bow windows fitted with glass panels were provided for the principal ground floor rooms, and large mirrors were employed to great effect all over the house. The house was also one of the first to be designed with an electricity supply from the outset and Alfred installed the very latest central heating system. A hydraulic lift was built in order to transport luggage and fuel to the upper floors of the house. In addition water was warmed in the basement and provided to every floor. The house contained a good number of modern lavatories and bathrooms and a swimming bath or cold plunge pool was even installed in the basement.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Escott, *The Story of Halton House*, p. 37.



Figure 57: Halton House, Salon glass dome and belvedere tower (Escott, *The Story of Halton House*)

Waddesdon Manor

Waddesdon Manor was also rife with modern details: at its core was a steel frame which allowed the room layouts to vary by floor; hot and cold water was provided to the multiple bathrooms throughout the house; and electric lighting was installed. During her visit Queen Victoria is said to have spent ten minutes turning an electric chandelier on and off, having never seen such a thing before.

Chapter Five

The Collections and Interiors of the English Rothschild Houses in the Vale of Aylesbury

The English Rothschild family were known as collectors of paintings, furniture and *objets d'art* in the nineteenth century. The collections and collecting activities of the family throughout Europe became widely famous by the twentieth century. Generally members of the English branch of the family favoured French eighteenth-century furniture and *objets d'art*, Renaissance *Schatzkammer* objects along with variously (though not universally) Old Master paintings, English eighteenth-century portraits and French eighteenth century paintings. This chapter will begin by discussing what is meant by a collector, and identify some of the most common reasons why individuals may be induced to collect. It will consider whether the English Rothschild family were motivated by any such reasons in the furnishing of their houses in the Vale of Aylesbury and their collecting activities. Such considerations include whether family members collected purely for the pleasure it brought them, as an investment, through competition with others, or in order to seek social recognition or advancement, and perhaps even create a unique identity. This chapter will also address the reasons why family members favoured certain objects and modes of presentation, and if they were unique or unusual in their undertakings, following or setting trends.

Collecting and collections

In order to examine the collections and collecting activities of the English Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury it is important to consider what is meant by a collector, and what it means to collect. A collector is distinct from an accumulator. The latter amasses indiscriminately and rather submissively a miscellanea of objects which carry no symbolic meaning.¹ The collector however actively acquires objects which are of interest to them, and rationalises purchases with a variety of explanations. As Jean Baudrillard relates:

Collecting proper emerges at first with an orientation to the cultural: it aspires to discriminate *between* objects, privileging those which have some exchange value

¹ R.M. Phillips, 'The accumulator', *Archives of General Psychiatry* 6: 474-7.

or which are also 'objects' of conservation, of commerce, of social ritual, of display – possibly which are even a source of profit.²

A collector may also frequently be eager for contemporaries to view their collection in order to exhibit their discrimination and taste. Of course it is possible, as Susan Pearce notes, for a collector to buy so 'uncritically and in such quantities that they resemble accumulators', but as she also states such a collector cannot be called a connoisseur.³

Once collected an object takes on symbolic meaning, and if no longer utilised it can be possessed, as Baudrillard notes:

The object pure and simple, divested of its function, abstracted from any practical context, takes on a strictly subjective status. Now its destiny is to be collected. Whereupon it ceases to be a carpet, a table, a compass, or a knick-knack, and instead turns into an 'object' or a 'piece'.⁴

As Baudrillard also identifies, the fact that an object within a collection may have a function is usually immaterial to a collector: that an old stamp can be put on a letter or an old car driven becomes far less important than possessing the object itself, divested of its function.⁵ The objects often take on a social meaning, for example implying status, prestige, wealth and so on: individuals will always attach 'moral and economic values' to objects, which helps to shape their identities and bring significance to their lives.⁶ For the collector one object will never be enough: the object of consumption can only function via its relation with other objects. A whole succession is therefore required and sometimes an entire set will be the goal, signifying the accomplishment of a 'mission'.⁷ Pearce identifies that objects are socially meaningful but 'their meaning is produced by arranging them in sets, both mentally and physically'.⁸ A useful definition of the terms collector and collection is sited here:

² Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1994), p. 22.

³ Frederick Baekeland, 'Psychological aspects of art collecting', in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. by Susan Pearce, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 205.

⁴ Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', p. 8.

⁵ Richard J. Lane, *Jean Baudrillard* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 72.

⁶ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: an investigation into collecting in the European tradition* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 16.

⁷ Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', p. 8.

⁸ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 14.

We take collecting to be the selective, active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession and disposition of an interrelated set of differentiated objects (material things, ideas, beings, or experiences) that contribute to, and derive extraordinary meaning from the entity (the collection) that this set is perceived to constitute.⁹

It is possible to highlight certain reasons why an individual may collect. Firstly collecting can bring a good deal of pleasure, satisfying an aesthetic desire as well as a need for possession. The attraction to a fine work of art, combined with the wish to own such a special work and the final pleasure of possession and enjoyment can be a powerful motivation to collect. As Baudrillard notes 'Possession entails a certain intimate delirium...one fondles and scrutinises the privileged piece. It equally involves activities of seeking out, categorizing, gathering and disposing.'¹⁰ He offers a further explanation for the satisfaction a collector gains in possession in this context:

It can be said that the object is the perfect pet. It represents the one 'being' whose qualities extend my person rather than confine it. In their plurality, objects are the sole things in existence with which it is truly possible to co-exist..they incline obediently towards myself, to be smoothly inventorized within my consciousness. The object is that which allows itself to be simultaneously 'personalized' and catalogued...anything can be possessed, invested in, or, in terms of collecting, arranged, sorted and classified.¹¹

This possession and the creation of a collection also offers an opportunity to escape, and to 'abolish time' or 'translate real time into the dimensions of a system'.¹² The collector surrounded by their private collection is in a dimension of existence removed from time and imbued with self.¹³

Secondly some collectors use their collections and collecting activity to enhance their self-definition, perhaps to bring more meaning to their lives and form an identity for

⁹ R. Belk, M. Wallendorf, J. Sherry, M. Holbrook, 'Collecting in a Consumer Culture', *Highways and Buyways* (Provo, Utah: Association for Consumer Research, 1990) p. 8

¹⁰ Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', p. 8.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹² Ibid., p. 16.

¹³ Ibid.

themselves. The inclination to collect can also be as a result of pure acquisitiveness. As John Elsner and Roger Cardinal find, 'as one becomes conscious of one's self, one becomes a conscious collector of identity, projecting one's being onto the objects one chooses to live with. Taste, the collector's taste, is a mirror of self.'¹⁴ Furthermore collections may be a means to bring order and structure to a collector's life.¹⁵ As Baudrillard suggests: 'for while the object is a resistant material, it is also simultaneously, a mental realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is governed by myself alone'.¹⁶

A further motivation to collect lies in the ability to rationalise purchases with a reference to investment. Collecting is usually a socially acceptable form of spending and consumption, and art objects in particular can be considered as relatively straightforward and secure forms of investment. This was certainly the case for the Rothschild family in many cases, as will be shown in later chapters. The act of collecting may also often be motivated by competition: a result of the desire to extend one's business activities from 'the boardroom and market-place to the auction gallery and drawing room.'¹⁷ The satisfaction of obtaining an object before a rival, and thus winning any competition often drives many individuals towards the purchase of an object and expansion of any collection. The ability to induce others to feel jealousy for one's possession and to know they appreciate the object's prestige can be compelling to a collector. Furthermore, through a desire for immortality some may create a collection that is intended to survive after their death and therefore retain their memory. Many highly successful collectors through history have left their collections to museums, on the condition they bear their name. Such a long-lasting memorial can thus be created, something which may not be possible perhaps through business success or offspring.

Finally, and perhaps most pertinent to this thesis, is the notion that individuals often collect through a wish for social advancement. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is interested in the ways in which the dominant classes retain their position in any society. He finds this cannot be explained by reference to economics alone, and explores the ways in which people use cultural knowledge to underpin their place in society. Bourdieu sees power as

¹⁴ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, 'Introduction', in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1994), p. 3.

¹⁵ Baekeland, 'Psychological aspects of art collecting', p. 215.

¹⁶ Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', p. 7.

¹⁷ Baekeland, 'Psychological aspects of art collecting', p. 206.

'culturally and symbolically created', and continually re-legitimised through an interaction of 'agency and structure'.¹⁸ This happens through what he calls 'habitus' or 'socialised norms and tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking'. Broadly Bourdieu's habitus can be defined as 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them'.¹⁹ Bourdieu's research into the ways in which cultural tastes arise out of, and are mobilised in, struggles for social recognition or status is important to consider here. His sociology of cultural consumption asserts broadly that

social status involves practices which emphasize and exhibit cultural distinctions and differences which are a crucial feature of all social stratification...While status is about political entitlement and legal location within civil society, status also involves, and to a certain extent is, style.²⁰

He further finds that cultural symbols and categories are frequently used as instruments of power, and that using symbols to take a position in space 'reproduces in a transfigured form the field of social positions'.²¹ As J. Gaventa writes:

Cultural capital – and the means by which it is created or transferred from other forms of capital – plays a central role in societal power relations, as this 'provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste'.²²

Those at the top of the social hierarchy will always seek to impose their view of legitimate culture on others, and to use it as a way of reinforcing their position. As Bourdieu identifies taste can therefore mark and maintain social boundaries, the upper classes in particular being able to create a sense of distinction.²³ The preferences of a collector of art can often be explained by reference to their personality, upbringing, their past and present contact with art, and the state of their finances. Admiration for art is a cultural product of a specific

¹⁸ L. Wacquant, 'Habitus', in *International Encyclopaedia of Economic Sociology*, ed. by J. Becket and Z. Milan (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 316.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ B.S. Turner, *Status* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), p. 66.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Symbolic Power', *Critique of Anthropology*, 13 (1979), 77-85.

²² J. Gaventa, 'Power after Lukes: a review of the literature', *Brighton Institute of Development Studies Bulletin*, 2003, p. 6.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

process resulting from the influences of one's parents, social background and education; it is something which is learnt.²⁴ Collecting of art throughout history has come to imply that the owner has sufficient and appropriate education, 'cultivation and refinement'.²⁵ It will be recognised in any society that taste and preference correspond to education level and social class, thus taste is one of the 'key signifiers and elements of social identity' of social value and of status.²⁶ Such theories of social distinction (as well as upbringing) in relation to taste and collecting must be considered when examining English Rothschild family members as country house owners and collectors.

That taste is an indication of one's social status must also be linked to the idea that a collector may collect as a result of a preoccupation with the past, and with provenance or reputation. Objects which possess an association with a particular moment in history, or a famous individual or collector often feature in a collector's assembly of works of art. Through these objects the collector may be able to identify with the past, and perhaps associate themselves with past figures or events in an attempt to enhance their status or reputation. As S.N. Behrman suggests 'it should occasion no surprise that rich businessmen who themselves lack pedigrees are sometimes attracted to buying family portraits of dead aristocrats with whom they presumably would like to identify'.²⁷ As will be shown the Rothschild family were certainly drawn to objects with strong historical associations or which had famous former owners.

Ideas of taste and social status in relation to collecting must also be linked to wealth, hospitality and leisure: style and the collecting of objects can often be used to express such ideas or attributes. The term 'conspicuous consumption' is said to have been first coined in the nineteenth century by the economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen in his work *The Theory of the Leisure Class* of 1899.²⁸ Veblen used the term to refer to certain behaviours of the *nouveaux riches*.²⁹ Broadly the term came to stand for the purchase and acquisition of luxury goods or services in order to display one's economic success and power (be that an income or accumulated wealth). As this kind of display is usually made in public it becomes a method of increasing social position, or maintaining a particular

²⁴ Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 133.

²⁵ Baekeland, 'Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting', p. 206.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

²⁷ S.N. Behrman, *Duveen* (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 97.

²⁸ A. Trigg, 'Veblen, Bourdieu, and conspicuous consumption', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 35, 99-115.

²⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1924).

status. That consumption of certain objects (such as art objects) can reveal to contemporaries that the purchaser has an ability to enjoy significant leisure time and to offer lavish hospitality is linked to such displays of wealth.

Yet, whilst the formation of a collection may often be highly influenced by one's upbringing, education, or by an inherited inclination, sometimes collections can be formed in order to separate oneself from others and create a unique identity. As Elsner and Cardinal suggest 'to resist the criteria inculcated by one's generation and class, and to collect against the grain – to wriggle out of belonging to an established set.'³⁰ Sometimes collectors do not wish to follow social expectations and instead take a different approach, attempting to form a different taste than others and to be distinctive. This might perhaps extend to efforts to 'challenge the norm' and successfully defy established modes of collecting. Such a collector may be called pioneering, experimental, one who seeks to 'parody orthodox connoisseurship, to challenge the expectations of social behaviour, even to construct a maverick anti-system'.³¹ It will be important to consider whether the Rothschild family, in their collecting and choices for the interiors of their houses, were endorsing existing trends or pioneering new tastes and interests in this period.

An important conclusion to make regarding collecting as a cultural system, and particularly when examining the collections of the English Rothschild family, is that eventually a collection becomes part of a broader project or arena, is confronted by others, and constitutes itself as a message.³² As Pearce identifies, objects and collections act as signs and symbols, 'creating categories and transmitting messages which can be read'.³³ Many previous writers have assumed that through their country mansions and collections of paintings, furniture and *objets d'art* the English Rothschild family were trying to convey certain messages. One might ask if the Rothschild family made deliberate, calculated, and consistent decisions to build houses in a certain style, to decorate their interiors in a specific way, and to create a particular aesthetic or impression through the objects they collected. Perhaps they took such actions in order to exhibit their refined social position, the level of their education, or perhaps they did it in order to display their wealth, their capacity to entertain lavishly, and their ability to indulge in a sophisticated leisure activity.

³⁰ Elsner and Cardinal, 'Introduction', p. 3.

³¹ Ibid., p. 4.

³² Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', p. 22.

³³ Pearce, *On Collecting*, p. 15.

Whether the Rothschild family attempted to do this through imitation and the endorsement of established trends in architecture and collecting, or instead by establishing their own tastes and distinctive style, challenging accepted modes of display, will be explored in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Importantly this thesis will also consider if the judgement that the English Rothschild family consciously managed a deliberate campaign for the presentation of their country mansion and collections is entirely correct: that the houses and collections were of a certain nature and character could in fact have been due simply to factors which were more local, personal and inherited.

The houses of the English Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury: the interiors and collections

The English Rothschild family and Old Master paintings

English Rothschild family members took an interest in collecting certain Old Master paintings and displayed them at their country mansions in the nineteenth century. The most notable collector of the school in the family was Lionel de Rothschild, but his son Alfred de Rothschild and nephew Ferdinand de Rothschild also displayed multiple examples at Halton House and Waddesdon Manor. A taste for Old Master paintings was generally shown by the traditional types of collector in this period, especially the aristocracy, who inherited the possessions or continued the conventions of their eighteenth-century ancestors. The purchase of Old Master works was fraught with difficulties for men who had not had the luxury of a European tour or extensive European and classical education. Furthermore many Old Master works on sale in the nineteenth century were of dubious authenticity, and therefore dangerous investments. Thus certain new collectors avoided the Old Masters and instead purchased works by living artists.³⁴ In addition Old Master works became so popular in this period that that they were priced out of the reach of some *nouveau-riche*. We might ask why the Rothschild family, as *nouveau-riche* collectors, endorsed the preference for Dutch and Flemish Old Master works which was a rather aristocratic canon of taste in this period. There is nothing greatly surprising about the family wishing to acquire such works: the collecting of such paintings was a standard canon of taste in the nineteenth century and a still-flourishing pursuit. Dutch and

³⁴ Diane MacLeod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 44.

Flemish Old Master paintings were generally uncontroversial in subject matter, non-religious, domestic in scale and visually pleasing. It is likely the Rothschild family simply admired and could afford these works.

Increase status

As noted, the collecting of Old Master works was traditionally considered an aristocratic taste. George IV was responsible for encouraging the popularity of Dutch seventeenth-century landscapes for example, and the collectors who had promoted Old Master works as a result of their success in the purchase of the picture collection of Philippe Egalité, duc d'Orléans, were predominantly aristocratic individuals.³⁵ Perhaps therefore the Rothschild family, in collecting Old Master works and displaying them in their country mansions, were attempting to emulate this upper class taste and shake off any possible perception of their *nouveau-riche* background.

Yet this is unlikely to be the only, or indeed most important, explanation. It was not only the old aristocracy who entered into the market for Old Master works in the nineteenth century: other newly-wealthy men with the funds and confidence also pursued these paintings just before the Rothschilds entered the market. They included for example Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet, the poet and banker Samuel Rogers, and John Julius Angerstein, a London merchant and Lloyd's under-writer.³⁶ Perhaps the most prolific of *nouveau-riche* Old Master collectors in this period were the Baring brothers: Sir Thomas Baring and Alexander Baring (later Lord Ashburton), as well as Sir Thomas's son (also Thomas). In collecting Old Master works the English Rothschilds were not displaying a taste wholly reserved for the aristocracy, nor importantly were they setting new trends amongst *nouveau-riche* collectors.

Supply and fashionable taste

It is likely that in collecting these objects English Rothschild family members were following the example set by others and simply admired and enjoyed collecting Old Master works. The demand for Old Master paintings in the nineteenth century was generally high and the

³⁵ They included figures such as the 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne, the 4th Duke of Northumberland, William Beckford, and the Prince Regent (later George IV).

³⁶ Peel amassed 128 works of art, 78 of which were by Dutch masters.

success of the 'Orléans generation' had spurred on many other wealthy collectors to acquire similar works.³⁷ Evidence of this interest was seen at the 1824 summer exhibition at the British Institution which featured 178 Old Master works from 58 separate lenders.³⁸ Events such as the French Revolution and subsequent European wars brought many significant collections of Dutch Old Master works to the British market. As the supply increased so a taste for Dutch and Flemish seventeenth-century genre and landscape painting in Britain continued and rose in the 1850s and 1860s.³⁹ The increased popularity of such works at this time had spread from Paris, where contemporary painters began to take more interest in a traditional eighteenth-century French taste for the Dutch Masters, and be inspired in their own works by them.⁴⁰

An explanation for the Rothschilds' interest in Old Master works may be simply that the level of supply of the objects in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, combined with the Rothschild family's great wealth, made them obvious items for them to acquire. In the nineteenth century the English Rothschilds attended sale rooms, and had the opportunity to view collections at the residences of their contemporaries and friends; in addition private picture galleries and other collections (for example Stafford House and Grosvenor House, London) were increasingly open to visitors during this period, offering guidebooks or tours. Commonly such collections or residences reflected their aristocratic origins and contained high numbers of Old Master works which the Rothschilds would have viewed.

An increase in national public exhibitions staged all over Europe in this period must have provided opportunities for the family to view these works of art, as well the catalogues and periodical articles accompanying them. It is likely they attended the shows at the British Institution and the Royal Academy which were open to the general public. A number of these high profile public exhibitions in the nineteenth century focussed on Old Master works: for example those at the British Institution, Royal Academy and the Manchester Art Treasures exhibition of 1857. In addition a greater number of publications began to be produced on the subject of collecting in this period which examined Old Master works in

³⁷ This was a term first used by Francis Haskell to describe those collectors who had benefitted from the sale of the picture collection of Philippe Egalité, duc d'Orléans, in London in 1799.

³⁸ Thomas Smith, *Recollections of the British Institution* (London, 1860), p. 177.

³⁹ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume I The Rise and Fall of Picture Prices 1760-1960* (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1961), p. 120.

⁴⁰ Generally a less Italianising style was preferred, which included artists such as Cuyp, Potter and Hobbema. Less popular by now however were the works of Berchem, Wouvermans and Teniers: Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume I*, p. 135.

particular: for example John Smith's *Catalogue Raisonne of the works of Dutch, Flemish and French Painters* (1833); C.J. Nieuwenhuys's *Review of the Lives and Works of Some of the Most Eminent Painters* (1834), Gustav Waagen's, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (1838) and the *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* by Michael Bryan (1816), a dealer who played a key role in the sale of the Orléans collection in 1799.⁴¹ Such publications were widely available and must have been read by the Rothschild family.

Secure investment and background

A further reason why Dutch and Flemish Old Master paintings may have been collected by certain Rothschild family members is that these works had proved their economic value over time and were considered by them as secure investments with low financial risks. In addition, unlike so many other *nouveau-riche* individuals of this period, the English Rothschilds could call upon strong European connections and experiences to inform their knowledge of Old Master painting, making them more knowledgeable about these works (in a way more akin to aristocratic collectors). English Rothschild family members undertook an extended tour of Europe in early adulthood and travelled regularly throughout their lives, coming into contact with foreign collections and markets. Such experiences must have enabled Rothschild family members to develop a knowledge and understanding beyond that of their *nouveau-riche* contemporaries.

The historical background of the family to which the English Rothschilds belonged also encouraged a taste for Old Master works: the founder of the Rothschild fortunes, Mayer Amschel Rothschild, was a Frankfurt merchant and banker who forged a taste for Dutch and Flemish Old Master works which would last many generations. Growing up amongst collections of Old Master paintings the English Rothschilds must have been encouraged to continue a Germanic taste for such objects in their English mansions.

⁴¹ John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonne of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols (London, 1821-1842) ; C. J. Nieuwenhuys, *A review of the lives and works of some of the most eminent painters: with remarks on the opinions and statements of former writers* (London: William Clowes, 1834); G. F. Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (London: John Murray, 1838); Michael Bryan, *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*, 5 vols (G. Bell & Sons: London, 1903-05).

Italian and Spanish Old Master paintings

Whilst the English Rothschild family endorsed a common preference in this period for Old Master works of the Dutch and Flemish schools, a note must be added on the lack of interest that they showed in Old Master paintings of other schools, those which were also considered at this time as being part of a more aristocratic canon of taste. It has been shown that the English Rothschild family showed only an occasional passing interest in Italian and Spanish Old Master works. The only individual to venture into this area of collecting was Mayer at Mentmore House, where around 10 works were on display.⁴² This was an isolated example, and generally other residences in the Vale of Aylesbury contained very few Italian works. Such works posed significant problems of authenticity in the nineteenth century and so were considered by the family as risky investments. In addition the subjects of such paintings could be problematic, often depicting Christian themes. Exceptionally however works by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo depicting Christ or the Madonna and Child, instead of being considered by the family as overt religious works, often appealed to them as depictions of family life or maternal love.⁴³

The English Rothschild family and English eighteenth-century paintings

The English Rothschild family of the nineteenth century showed a significant interest in English eighteenth-century portraits. In particular Lionel, his sons Nathaniel and Alfred, and his nephew Ferdinand had a taste for these works. Their acquisition would become an essential part of the English Rothschilds' interests in collecting, particularly for the most flamboyant of their mansions. With strong continental backgrounds and a taste for French decorative schemes, *objets d'art* and furniture the collecting and display of English portraits by Rothschild family members may seem surprising. It is probable that these English works were acquired because of their subject matter and style. It is also possible that the objects brought with them a degree of prestige and association with the upper classes which enabled the English Rothschilds to project a particular image of themselves.

⁴² In this he was probably influenced by his primary dealer, Alexander Barker.

⁴³ For example *The Good Shepherd* and *Virgin* at Tring Park House and *St Joseph and the Infant Child* at Halton House.

Supply and fashionable taste

The English Rothschild family may have acquired English eighteenth-century portraits simply because they were readily available on the art market. As the agricultural crisis of the 1870s gathered pace many aristocratic landowners began to regard family heirlooms as forms of ready cash. Such men perhaps had few qualms in selling a portrait of a great-grandparent (or even grandparent) no longer in living memory. The sale of such property was further encouraged later in the century by the introduction of the Settled Land Act of 1882.⁴⁴ Furthermore the budget changes instituted by William Harcourt in 1894 implemented a radical scheme of graduated death duties which were a further incentive to sell such inherited possessions. Thus a great number of portraits left the hands of the families for whom they were painted and were released on to the market.⁴⁵ The increased availability of these objects drove them back into fashion.⁴⁶ At the beginning of the nineteenth century the value of many English eighteenth-century portraits was not high but by the end of the century the collecting of such works had become a craze, and they dominated the market.⁴⁷ A Gainsborough 'portrait cult' was particularly strong.⁴⁸

Many *nouveau-riche* individuals coveted these paintings, perhaps enlisting history in the pursuit of higher social recognition. As Diane Macleod notes this English art may have been a way for such collectors to 'stabilize their social category...this was one area that offered a sense of empowerment, either through instant identification with the past or by its elitist associations'.⁴⁹ Thus an interest was shown in these objects by men wishing to be 'perceived as gentlemen'. By the end of the century this included certain exceptionally wealthy American plutocrats. The *Art Journal* of 1896 reported on this trend:

During the last decade the auction worship of Reynolds, Romney, Gainsborough, and their compeers, has increased with remarkable fervour, and the comparative absence of "Old Master" collections from the sale rooms has had the natural effect of encouraging this worthy and patriotic cult. Not that the desire to acquire Early

⁴⁴ An act which facilitated sales, leases, and other dispositions of settled land and associated chattels.

⁴⁵ Michael Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2005), p. 296.

⁴⁶ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II The Rise and Fall of Objets d'art Prices Since 1750* (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1961), p. 116.

⁴⁷ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume I*, p. 160.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

⁴⁹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 337.

British examples is confined solely to British collectors. There was a time when American picture-buyers satisfied themselves with securing the magnificent masterpieces of the French School to the exclusion of other works. Now, however, they also acknowledge the attraction of a fine British canvas, and the result is evident in the increased competition at auction.⁵⁰

The Rothschild family would of course been aware of the rise in interest of these items, Lionel in particular seems to have anticipated the increase in popular appeal of such objects. Michael Hall believes Lionel deliberately began collecting these works in the 1860s as he sensed it was a 'particularly good moment to move into an underrated and expectant market'.⁵¹ Lionel's sons Nathaniel and Alfred continued this interest from the late 1870s onwards. London art dealers were quick to recognise the rise in demand and sought to supply the buoyant market: the influence of collectors on individual Rothschild family members has been noted and must have been a factor in directing their tastes. In addition Sir Charles Eastlake (1793-1865) was an early influence on the rise in popularity for English eighteenth-century portraits and began purchasing these works for the National Gallery from 1862: the Rothschild family must have been aware of this development and indeed members of the family had belonged to the Collectors Club at the same time as Eastlake where it is possible such subjects had been discussed.

Investment

According to Hall, Lionel, his sons and nephew were 'amongst the earliest collectors' of English eighteenth-century portraits.⁵² Hall believes Lionel saw a 'long-term, low-risk investment opportunity'.⁵³ These works were indeed a safe investment for the family: their provenance and authenticity could be confirmed and the subjects would never be undesirable, remaining attractive to most future collectors. It is very likely the English Rothschilds' interest in these works was motivated by financial conditions.

⁵⁰ Salesroom correspondent, *Art Journal*, 1896, p.282.

⁵¹ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 338.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

Aristocratic associations and patriotism

In addition it is highly likely that these works appealed to the Rothschild family as they generally depicted aristocracy, and had formerly been the property of this group. Thus such objects brought with them a certain prestige which bolstered the status of the purchaser. The family had no doubt seen other country houses, on tours and as guests, and perhaps wished to emulate the collections they had seen.

Holger Hock also asserts that in the nineteenth century generally there was a 'conspicuous growth in the formation of exclusively British collections and additions to existing Old Master collections of British works.'⁵⁴ Hock believes in this period more attention was being paid to works of the national school by men of all classes and situations (including financiers or industrialists as well as 'men of noble or genteel backgrounds').⁵⁵ Hock asserts that the most obvious motive for the shift towards British art in this period was likely to have been 'cultural patriotism':

Art collecting was legitimised as a patriotic cultural service...To invest in (one's liking of) British art, meant to exercise patronage in a pedagogical and patriotic manner. For many collectors it was part of strategies to construct a patriotic persona...As collectors' private taste was presented as a national asset, collecting British art became a form of virtuous citizenship.⁵⁶

It is possible that the collecting of these works by English artists depicting English sitters was an attempt by the third generation of English Rothschilds to underline the fact that for all their continental connections and background they were in fact British, and to ensure their collections reflected native tastes.

⁵⁴ Holger Hock, "'Struggle against a Vulgar Prejudice': Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 566-591.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Subject matter

Whilst financial considerations and a wish to emulate others may have been factors in motivating the English Rothschild family to acquire these objects, in fact they probably appealed most as a result of their subject matter and decorative appearance. Lionel's words for example when he remarked he found this school of work 'unrivalled in charm' support this conclusion.⁵⁷ The new Rothschild owners had no association with the sitters of the portraits and so the paintings were transformed into works of art rather than family heirlooms. Lionel and his sons seem overwhelmingly to have favoured portraits by Joshua Reynolds, George Romney and Thomas Gainsborough. In this they joined the enthusiasm in this period for works by these artists and generally limited themselves to depictions of woman and children, represented in the romantic manner, often sentimental and frequently highly fashionable. The Rothschild family were interested in the artistic merit and beauty of the glamorous sitters and associated romantic settings. These attractive pictures were acquired to complement and add elegance and an impression of beauty or glamour (as well as family life in some cases) to the interior schemes at Tring Park House, Halton House and Waddesdon Manor. It is probable also that the interest many Rothschild family members showed for the historical value of art objects also factored in their choices here: frequently the sitters of the portraits they acquired would be well-known (for example, amongst many others, the portraits of Lady Hamilton at Halton House and *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* at Tring Park House).

The rise in popularity in this period of English eighteenth-century portraits owed somewhat to the Rothschild family. Lionel and his sons didn't however change tastes (these works would have become popular anyway) but they contributed to changing 'the perception of them as works of art' and increasing demand.⁵⁸ The market for these works rose partially in response to the competition the Rothschilds created for them: when their tastes became known, other collectors (often *nouveau-riche* individuals) followed suit. This change was reflected in the rise in their value from the 1860s onwards. Alfred, Nathaniel and Ferdinand were determined in their acquisition of these works, and could pay high prices for the most admired pieces.

⁵⁷ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 297.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 315.

The English Rothschild family and the patronage of contemporary artists

In certain areas of collecting the English Rothschild family of the nineteenth century showed a number of innovative inclinations: for example in the acquisition of French eighteenth-century paintings. Yet in the collecting and display of Dutch and Flemish Old Master works and in the display of English eighteenth-century portraits the English Rothschild family revealed their tastes as English collectors to be rather more conventional and following in modes of display that were generally considered traditional and perhaps aristocratic. Contributing to this impression of a more conservative taste was the fact that, in contrast to many *nouveau-riche* individuals, the English Rothschild family rarely entered the contemporary art market. The family lagged behind many other *parvenus* in this period in their interest in contemporary artists and preferred instead to continue already established collecting patterns. It is possible to speculate about the reasons for this. Firstly, as discussed, the family did not lack confidence or funds to purchase Old Master paintings as other newly wealthy men may have. Secondly contemporary works did not appeal to the family's love of collecting objects with rich historical associations. This was also an inherited tendency; historically the Rothschild family had not generally commissioned new works. There were two exceptions to this general rule: at Mentmore House portraits of *Baron Mayer de Rothschild* by George F. Watts and *Baroness Mayer de Rothschild* by Frederic Leighton hung in the Green Drawing Room and had been commissioned by Mayer in the early 1870s.⁵⁹ At Tring Park House *The Honourable Walter Rothschild* by Walter Oules and *Portrait of Lord Rothschild* by George F. Watts were both commissioned in the 1880s. These artists were the most esteemed of the time. Evidently when the family did choose to commission portraits they chose high-profile names. Furthermore the authenticity of the works would be confirmed so they were a good investment. The works though must be considered more as personal, commemorative family portraits than artistic works intended for later financial gain.

⁵⁹ Mayer also owned a work by Thomas Gainsborough entitled *Greyhounds Coursing a Fox*, which was hung on the Grand Staircase, a work by Edwin Cooper, *A Group of Mounted Huntsmen*, which probably depicted Mayer and his two brothers and a number of portraits of racing horses by English artists. The presence of these works, a particular class of English school paintings, can be explained by Mayer's admiration for hunting and for horseracing. He also inherited the family piece by Edwin D. Smith showing Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1836), his wife Hannah (1783-1850) and their seven children.

The French Rococo-revival style in the nineteenth century

The English Rothschild family of the nineteenth century often employed French historical styles for interior schemes in their houses in the Vale of Aylesbury. At Mentmore House it was seen in the Drawing Rooms and dramatically in the Dining Room, as well as several other ground floor rooms. Aston Clinton House and Tring Park House contained at least two major reception rooms with French Rococo motifs and at Halton House and Waddesdon Manor the style was applied to almost every room, extravagantly and comprehensively. Frequently the architectural details, panels, *boiseries*, floors, fabrics and soft furnishings of these rooms recalled the interior decoration of the *dix-huitième*. Perhaps more tellingly, even if rooms in these residences were not overtly presented in this style, they were always filled to capacity with furniture, paintings and *objets d'art* of the French eighteenth-century.⁶⁰ In examining the Rothschild country houses in the Vale of Aylesbury, and their function or use, it is important to question why such a seemingly foreign style was so prevalent, and the motivations behind its adoption by the family.

Development and popularity

The interest that the English Rothschild family showed in French eighteenth-century styles and objects was not a unique or pioneering one in this period, and it is possible that in creating interiors in this manner the family were following certain existing modes of behaviour. From the 1820s and 30s, and following into subsequent decades, British society witnessed an overwhelming growth of interest in the historical, and an increased historical awareness. In interior decoration this frequently meant that past styles were recalled and elements of historical styles employed in modern furnishings. There were a large variety of styles available and many were in fashion simultaneously, sometimes shown together in one residence (e.g. the Gothic, the Rococo, the classical). The release of a large volume of historical objects occasioned by the French Revolution and Napoleonic disruptions (and later also by sales of the increasingly impoverished aristocracy) combined with the widening of standard canons of taste brought about by an expansion of personal wealth to a greater number of people created a climate in which experimentation with historical styles in interiors was encouraged.

⁶⁰ Clarke F. Andreae, 'A French/English Dialogue in Architecture and Interior Decoration from the Mid-Eighteenth Century until the Years between the Great Wars' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, 1997), p. 276.

Some British collectors began to take an interest in historical French styles and objects in the early nineteenth century. This attraction was not new: the tradition of collecting such items already existed in the eighteenth century as a result of the opportunities which the 'Grand Tour' offered young aristocrats. Individuals such as the 4th Earl of Orford and William Beckford for example in the eighteenth century had taken the time to journey via Paris in the course of their travels and had taken an interest in French decorative objects. Furthermore the peace between Britain and France after 1815 enabled the renewed exchange of style and fashion: this included the Rococo-revival. The sales in Britain of collections once belonging to figures such as Charles Alexandre de Calonne, Louis XVI's former finance minister (sold 1787), the duc d'Orléans (sold 1792 and 1798), Citoyen Francois-Antoine Robit (sold 1801), and the Prince de Talleyrand (sold 1817) were also significant in encouraging the revival in interest in French objects amongst certain individuals.

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, George IV (as Prince and King) played a significant part in encouraging an interest amongst certain upper class figures in the early-nineteenth century for French Rococo styles and objects. Ferdinand de Rothschild noted that George IV had 'trained a school of collectors who profited by his example'.⁶¹ Indeed following the example of the Prince Regent certain members of the English aristocracy and their advisers or dealers also pursued the Louis-revival style in the early part of the nineteenth century. George IV was encouraged in his pursuit of the style by a small set of advisers including the 2nd Earl of Lonsdale and the 3rd Marquess of Hertford, who often acted as his agent.⁶² Most figures had the opportunity to travel to France and acquire furnishings and could sometimes reside in Paris for years at a time (for example the 5th Duke and Duchess of Rutland, the 3rd Earl and Countess of Mansfield and the 10th Duke and Duchess of Hamilton). Certain aristocrats chose to import French objects to furnish their English residences: when redecorated for the 5th Duke of Rutland and his wife Elizabeth in the 1820s Belvoir Castle in Rutland featured some recycled

⁶¹ Rothschild, 'French Eighteenth Century Art in England', 375-390. These statements help to explain the presence in Waddesdon Manor's Drawing Room of an impressive full-length portrait of the Prince of Wales by Gainsborough, perhaps, as Michael Hall feels, acknowledging the prince as the initiator of the taste which so influenced Waddesdon's style. Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 70.

⁶² Lord Hertford was the friend and confidant of the Prince Regent, who appointed him Vice-Chamberlain in 1812. There are great similarities between the collection of Lord Hertford as seen today at Hertford House, London (the Wallace Collection) and the collections of the Rothschild family discussed in this thesis.

French *boiseries* in the drawing room for example.⁶³ The 2nd Earl de Grey also created some of the earliest Rococo-revival interiors at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, in 1834-39; and the 1st Baron Stuart de Rothesay shipped many items across the Channel to furnish Highcliffe Castle, Dorset, in the 1830s. Other examples were close to follow in the first few decades of the nineteenth century and included the owners of fashionable London town houses such as the 1st Duke of Sutherland at Stafford House, and the 6th Earl of Chesterfield at Chesterfield House.

It is possible the adoption of Francophile interiors and the collecting of French eighteenth-century objects was motivated by certain conceptual and premeditated reasons. For some aristocrats it may have been an attempt to self-consciously continue the traditions of their French counterparts and so deliberately emphasise their continuity with the past, revealing their 'role as inheritors of a tradition'.⁶⁴ The style in its early days often had 'distinct Tory undertones', and could be coupled with Gothic architecture, an overtly aristocratic choice. This was the case for example at the 'Anglo-Saxon' Belvoir, and at Windsor George IV combined Francophile interiors with an emphasis on the Gothic origins and style of the castle's architecture. The almost cult status of objects once belonging to Marie Antoinette may have been linked to this political incentive.

Such collecting tastes however did not yet diffuse very far through society, remaining mostly confined to the elite aristocracy who surrounded the King. The adoption of French styles of interior decoration was by no means widespread or common place. As Gerald Reitlinger states, it must be remembered that in the early-nineteenth century 'while prices were sometimes impressive, the actual number of people anxious to acquire French decorative art was never very large'.⁶⁵ He adds that in fact, 'the number of collectors resident in England who bought authentic French furniture in the first half of the nineteenth century could probably have been counted on the fingers of one hand'.⁶⁶ This was partly because, as Reitlinger notes, the taste for French furniture and *objets d'art* remained an expensive one: original eighteenth-century furniture with marquetry and ormolu detail, as well as various authentic architectural fittings, were only within the reach of the very rich. It

⁶³ The Duchess no doubt intended the scheme to be a backdrop for lavish entertaining at Belvoir and a large quantity of gilt and ormolu was employed which added to the opulent effect: Emma, Duchess of Rutland and Jane Pruden, *Belvoir Castle: A Thousand Years of Family Art and Architecture* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2009), p. 109.

⁶⁴ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 222.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

was also because at times this particular historical style was considered by a good deal of the upper classes to be overly flamboyant and frivolous. The style did not marry with English ideas of domesticity and national identity which were gathering pace as the century progressed (and were expressed in styles such as the Gothic or Jacobethan) and instead was altogether foreign, frequently associated with the extreme behaviour and eventual fall of the French aristocracy. In fact residences such as Highcliffe and Wrest Park which contained French interiors or collections were often looked on critically as a result of such concerns, and considered gaudy and foreign. Thus while some individuals toyed with the Francophile style in this early period there were few attempts to recreate entire French eighteenth-century interiors or to restrict a collection solely to French eighteenth-century objects.

Of course as the nineteenth century progressed the interest in the French Rococo-revival style began to move out of the small circle in which it had begun. By the end of the century it was no longer confined to the few aristocratic connoisseurs and royalty who had set the fashion in motion: the later decades of the century were when the French Rococo-revival style really became widely fashionable. Certain individuals of this period who pursued French eighteenth-century objects and styles became famed for their collections, driving the style into public notice either during their lifetime or as a result of the sales of their collections after their death. They included the 4th Marquess of Hertford; Sir Richard Wallace; the Randlord Sir Julius Charles Wernher, 1st Baronet; and of course the English Rothschild family. Ferdinand de Rothschild believed that Lord Hertford in particular encouraged a greater interest in the arts of eighteenth-century France in Britain in the later part of the century, as George IV had done earlier in the century, writing that

Lord Hertford brought it [French eighteenth-century art] into prominence and world-wide repute...In England it is true they were appreciated, but only by a limited circle, and it was due to Lord Hertford that they gained their new importance and fame.⁶⁷

Museums also entered the market for French eighteenth-century items in the latter part of the nineteenth century, increasing public awareness of the merits and historical attraction of the objects. Furthermore as museums began to expand their collections of decorative

⁶⁷ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

art objects so they began to find the need to contextualise these items with displays of period interiors.⁶⁸ The South Kensington Museum for example had begun a programme to acquire 'period rooms' and its first purchase was the Louis XVI boudoir of Madame de Sérilly from the *hôtel Sérilly*, Paris.⁶⁹

The English Rothschild family began collecting French eighteenth-century objects in the 1850s and 60s. Mayer for example possessed a good deal of such objects before he began building Mentmore House in 1852, and receipts suggest his brothers Lionel and Anthony were also acquiring such items in the late 1850s and 60s.⁷⁰ Evidence presented in this thesis shows Mayer and Anthony had begun to employ French Rococo-style interior schemes in their country houses of the Vale of Aylesbury from the early- to mid-1850s; their nephews Nathaniel and Alfred continued such collecting and furnishing from the 1880s onwards. English Rothschild family members were enthusiastic and ostentatious in their preference for French eighteenth-century objects and interiors in their properties. The family may have taken inspiration from the initial examples of earlier collectors who toyed with the style, but from the late 1850s and early 1860s the Rothschild family led a more intense interest, employing it wholesale and often on a great scale, to much expense. This tendency amongst family members gathered pace as the century progressed. In adopting French styles and collecting French objects English Rothschild family members were not therefore pioneer; however they did introduce and lead a certain fashion and enthusiasm within the general movement which gathered pace as the century progressed.

The English Rothschild family and the French Rococo-revival style

For the English Rothschild family in the second-half of the nineteenth century the Francophile style and French eighteenth-century decorative objects were an obvious choice: these objects were available on the market and the family had the money to purchase them. The taste for Francophile styles and objects amongst certain high profile collectors in British society must have been known to the Rothschilds. Evidence reveals they were familiar with numerous other collectors of French eighteenth-century objects and

⁶⁸ John Harris, *Moving Rooms: the trade in architectural salvages* (New Haven [Conn.]; London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, c.2007), introduction.

⁶⁹ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 90.

⁷⁰ RAL, XII/41/6A&B, Mayer de Rothschild receipted accounts, 1860s and 70s; Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883); RAL, XII/41/7-8, Lionel de Rothschild receipted accounts, 1850s-1870s; RAL, XII/41/1-4, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts, 1850s-70s.

probably discussed their collecting activities with these figures (for example at meetings of the Collectors Club).⁷¹ Such experiences must have influenced their choices in collecting. Figures such as Sir Henry Cole and J.C. Robinson who promoted the collecting of French eighteenth-century objects in public collections were known to the Rothschilds and also attended the Collectors Club where they must have discussed Francophile styles and decorative arts.⁷²

In Britain the 1851 Great Exhibition and the Manchester Treasures exhibition of 1857 gave support to the French eighteenth-century revival style. France was the largest foreign contributor to the Great Exhibition, and the displays included lavish tapestries, Sèvres porcelain, silks from Lyons, enamels from Limoges and eighteenth-century furniture. The International Exhibition of 1862 at South Kensington also included a high proportion of French eighteenth-century objects in its displays, confirming the taste for the Louis-revival style in Britain. The English Rothschilds were highly involved in these exhibitions. Lionel, Anthony and Mayer had put down £50,000 of the £180,000 guarantee fund required in June 1850 to allow the Great Exhibition to go forward and had served on its committee.⁷³

The English Rothschilds were probably further encouraged in the creation of Francophile interiors and the collecting of French decorative arts by the dealers to whom they turned and the wealth of objects of this kind available on the art market as the century progressed. The leading collectors of the day were played off against one another by these shrewd dealers.⁷⁴ The Durlacher Brothers firm, for example, counted amongst its clients Sir Richard Wallace, the South Kensington Museum and several members of the Rothschild family. This was also the case for John Webb of Old Bond Street who worked not only for the Rothschilds but also Lord Hertford and Henry Cole. The dealers Samuel Pratt, Alexander Barker and Samson Wertheimer and the firm Nixon and Rhodes similarly linked many collectors and probably encouraged the Rothschild family in their tastes for French decorative arts.

⁷¹ Notable members of this society who formed an interest in collecting eighteenth-century French decorative objects include Robert Napier, Sir John Marjoribanks, 3rd Baronet, R.S. Holford, Emanuele Taparelli d'Azeglio, Alexander Barker, and Baron Carlo Marochetti.

⁷² Sir Henry Cole was the first director of the South Kensington Museum and J.C. Robinson the first superintendent of the art collections at the South Kensington Museum.

⁷³ *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party; the political journals of Lord Stanley, 1849-68*, ed. by J.R.

Vincent (Sussex, Harvester, 1978), p. 27.

⁷⁴ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 212.

Historical associations

In addition to the plentiful supply of objects, the English Rothschild family were also motivated to collect French eighteenth-century objects and present interiors in the styles of this period out of an interest in the historical associations of the objects and styles. Importantly, as the nineteenth century progressed, the interest in decorative arts took on a 'particular flavour of nostalgia'.⁷⁵ At the same time as the Victorians began to look back through history and recall past styles in decorative schemes, the collections of the French monarchy and aristocracy were thrown on to the market: these objects now had an added appeal, which as Geoffrey de Bellaigue puts it, was 'part historical and part romantic'.⁷⁶

Tom Stammers considers that the French Revolution 'stimulated a widespread attraction to the past', particularly its material culture, and that the upset and disruption of the time helped to 'redistribute and reclassify' historical items. Stammers believes that there arose an increased interest in historical items or souvenirs, and that objects of the past (for example medals, prints, furniture and curios) became 'instructive, fashionable and eminently collectable'.⁷⁷ The private collector now fervently wished to own and preserve items associated with such a period of French history, the 'portents of the upheavals of 1789'.⁷⁸ Items such as ormolu furniture and Sèvres porcelain of the *Ancien Régime* could be bought relatively cheaply in the second-half of the nineteenth century and might help to emphasise a collector's fashionable sensibilities.

It became fashionable for some collectors to seek out objects and furniture which had once belonged to the French royal family (or members of their government), especially the most romantic or notorious figures.⁷⁹ There was a particular desire to acquire furniture associated with Marie Antoinette for example, as one of the most famous of personalities of the Revolution, or objects made by the most famous *ébénistes*.⁸⁰ Objects with such

⁷⁵ Hall, *Lasting Elegance*, p. 56.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey de Bellaigue, *Wallace Collection Monographs: Preferences in French Furniture* (London: Wallace Collection, 1979), p. 10.

⁷⁷ Tom Stammers, 'The Bric-a-brac of the Old Regime: collecting and cultural history in post-revolutionary France', *French History*, 22 (2008), 295-315.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Timothy Stevens and Peter Trippi, 'An Encyclopaedia of Treasures', in *A Grand Design: the Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, ed. by M. Barker and B. Richardson (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1996), 149-160.

⁸⁰ *Ebénistes* such as André-Charles Boulle, Jean-Henri Riesener and Adam Weiswiler. One particular example of eighteenth-century French furniture which stood out from others and was highly sought after was

provenances (or even those with supposed ones) could reach exaggerated prices in the sale rooms. The most admired textile hangings were those dating to the reign of Louis XIV (who had founded the royal Gobelins factory) and carpets from the royal Savonnerie factory were also highly desirable.

The English Rothschild family certainly sought objects which were associated with, or had proven links with, the French royal family and aristocracy of the eighteenth-century (as well as furniture which had been made by famous Parisian *ébénistes* and royal cabinet-makers). An interest in the historical value of works of art and styles is highly evident in all their mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury and must have been one of the reasons why they turned to Francophile tastes. In 1892 Ferdinand declared that the interest in the objects of the French eighteenth-century was based on their historical appeal which 'increased with their possession'.⁸¹

A *nouveau-riche* style: image-making

In addition to the factors explored above which motivated the English Rothschild family to employ Francophile styles and modes of collecting (at a time when that taste was not always regarded altogether favourably) an important issue to consider is the ease with which the French Rococo-revival style lent itself to the creation of a particular image.

The reasons why many newly-rich men of the nineteenth century might form collections of fine and decorative art and furniture could be numerous, and their emphasis varied between individuals. Firstly they might relate directly to the self: a love of art for example or the wish to find solace in the activity of collecting. Secondly the motivation could be born out of a concern for the future and material advantage, to advertise economic achievement or to make an investment. Finally often *nouveau-riche* individuals created art collections in order to 'represent, sustain, or enhance' their social status: in demonstrating their cultural acuity, education and financial means through the purchase and display of certain art objects, newly-wealthy men might hope to gain recognition and acceptance into a higher

that made by Boulle and his followers. Objects made by him (and later copies) competition for them had significantly risen in Britain: Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 235.

⁸¹ Ferdinand Rothschild, 'French Eighteenth Century Art in England', *The Nineteenth Century* (March 1892), 375-390.

level of society and achieve a more equal footing with the upper classes.⁸² In 1891 an author of the *Journal of Decorative Art* considered that

a knowledge of what is most in passing favour and demand throughout the fashionable world may, therefore, not only be considered of interest to decorators, but a *sine quâ non* to a progressive business man.⁸³

The concern with social status and acceptance was a factor in the adoption of this style by some *nouveaux riches* of the nineteenth century.

As the latter part of the nineteenth century progressed the French Rococo-revival style was adopted by large numbers of newly-wealthy individuals - so much so that it came to be considered as a particularly ostentatious *nouveau-riche* mode of presentation and older families began to entirely abandon it. The French Rococo style was often seen as the only appropriate style in this period for any wealthy individual wishing to advertise their success and affluence to adopt. Alternative styles had certain obvious drawbacks: the Queen Anne revival style or the Arts and Crafts interior of the later nineteenth century for example provided much less opportunity for conspicuous consumption and luxury, and the Gothic style did not allow the expression of a cosmopolitan background.⁸⁴ The French eighteenth-century revival style was generally marked by an intensity and richness of tone which gave the impression of extravagance and opulence. The best French Rococo-revival interiors were considered as containing elaborate *boiseries* and extensive glass and ormolu decoration; there was also a general enthusiasm for lavish eighteenth-century-style textiles and tapestries, furniture and *objets d'art*. Besides its aristocratic and historical attractions this beauty and aesthetic sumptuousness was also often what made it so appealing to the *parvenu*. Many *nouveau-riche* individuals (including the Rothschild family and other plutocrats) who began to favour Francophile interiors and collecting were now 'aestheticising a style that had been politicised in the 1810s': they were adopting the art of the past and creating something new out of it, creating a lavish and 'smart decorator's taste' which was divorced from any political allegiance.⁸⁵

⁸² Hoock, "'Struggle against a Vulgar Prejudice": Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century', 566-591.

⁸³ *Journal of Decorative Art*, XV (October 1891), 157.

⁸⁴ Charlotte Gere, *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p. 178.

⁸⁵ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 232.

Indeed numerous examples of *nouveau-riche* interiors exhibiting Louis-revival decor and containing much French ornament and decoration can be cited from the 1870s onwards. For example by the late-nineteenth century Cliffe Castle, Yorkshire (purchased in 1848 by the Butterfield family, a successful textile manufacturing dynasty) was presented as a lavish example of high Victorian opulence filled with French furniture, French fireplaces, French carpets, tapestries and hangings. Also of note were Kings Walden Bury, Hertfordshire, built 1889-90 for the Liverpool shipping magnate Thomas Fenwick Harrison; and Redleaf Hall, Kent, purchased by the chemical magnate Frank Hills (d.1893) in 1870.

That the adoption of Francophile modes of presentation and collecting tastes was motivated by its aesthetic appeal is further revealed by the kind of items acquired and effect created. Often the decorative appearance of the *boiseries* was heightened by the way they were employed for example. Generally in the eighteenth century the highly decorative panels were so expensive that they had been spaced out and interspersed with plain panels; now however certain collectors (Ferdinand de Rothschild at Waddesdon for example) filled entire rooms with these decorative panels only, producing a truly sumptuous look, much busier than had been originally intended.⁸⁶ In addition these panels were usually stripped, stained, and the ornamental details picked out in gilt: the previously painted eighteenth-century examples were therefore transformed to appeal to more extravagant nineteenth-century tastes.⁸⁷ That collectors were more often concerned in the second-half of the nineteenth century to acquire the most ostentatious pieces is revealed through the actions of certain dealers who often added to and 'improved' existing pieces of furniture with the addition of features such as ormolu mounts, Sèvres plaques or panels of marquetry (some of which could be of genuine eighteenth-century date but were often more modern).⁸⁸ Furthermore as the style grew in popularity and Victorian advances in mass-production made the recreation of its supposed elements far easier, the wider middle-classes began to reproduce elements of Louis-revival interiors: *papier mâché* imitation mouldings could serve as carved oak *boiseries* or galvanised plaster as gilded bronze (as seen for example at Halton House).⁸⁹ Often the style was far from faithfully

⁸⁶ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 101.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The Franco-Flemish ebony and gilt bronze cabinet (once thought to have belonged to Marie de Medici) in the collection of Mayer de Rothschild at Mentmore House is just one such example; Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 250.

⁸⁹ Charles McCorquodale, *A History of Interior Decoration* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), p. 165.

reproduced, with any, and indeed all, elements of the Rococo movement presented together, regardless of historical authenticity.

Finally the adoption of the French Rococo style was not a new taste by the third quarter of the nineteenth century but had grown from a rather aristocratic and historical sensibility. It is possible that some new men of wealth took inspiration from the tastes already developed by aristocratic collectors. The presentation of interiors in the French Rococo style and collecting of French eighteenth-century objects may have been considered by some *nouveaux riches* as a way to confirm their status and to purchase a certain pedigree, through the association with aristocratic and historical modes of collecting and presentation. The style had been associated with the very rich and was perhaps deemed suitable by some who wished to claim a higher position in society.

Continental influences

The preference for the Francophile style shown by the English Rothschild family can also be explained by their particular situation and background, which differed from many British collectors. As will be explained in more detail in Chapter Eight Rothschild family members maintained strong continental links, frequently travelling to Europe for business and leisure and sustaining connections with their continental relations. Such connections and experiences must have encouraged their interest in such a continental style of presentation. The revival of French eighteenth-century styles and decorative schemes was not unique to the English members of the family: other Rothschild individuals all over Europe were concurrently interested in French eighteenth-century styles and objects. Ferdinand's childhood home in Grünebourg for example (begun in 1845) featured French eighteenth-century interiors, which had been inspired by the furniture of the period.⁹⁰ Ferdinand asserted that Grünebourg was an 'altogether new departure from the fashion of the day...which was soon repeatedly imitated.'⁹¹ The English Rothschilds' French uncle James de Rothschild (1792-1868) also started work to present his Paris *hôtel* in this style soon after acquiring it in 1836. James also created Louis-revival interiors at his Chateau de Boulogne from 1855. James's children Alphonse (1827–1905), Gustav (1829–1911)

⁹⁰ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

and Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1934) also followed his example in their lavish Paris residences in the 1870s.

The influence of continental collectors and modes of collecting on English Rothschild tastes is clearly reflected in their interest in French eighteenth-century paintings. In the 1850s and 60s Mayer employed Mentmore as somewhat of a showcase for works of this school and was a significant pioneer in the taste for his family. Alfred also had a fondness for these works at Halton House. The interest shown by English Rothschild family members in these paintings was somewhat unusual for the period in Britain: the taste for such *Ancien Régime* paintings had almost entirely died away during the time of the French Revolution and their popularity was restricted for the rest of the century.⁹² A renewed interest for the paintings by some collectors occurred from the 1840s onwards, yet this was still an unusual taste for any English collector.⁹³ It is possible that in acquiring these paintings the English Rothschild family were following the example set by continental collectors: one of the earliest collectors to encourage a renewed interest in the works of French eighteenth-century artists was the 4th Marquess of Hertford, who lived in Paris and had begun collecting these works from 1840. Other prominent collectors of the time who drove a revival in this school of painting included the Parisian financiers Émile and Isaac Péreire and the duc de Morny (the half brother of Napoleon III). The competition of such collectors, who were inevitably very wealthy, encouraged the growth of a lively market in Paris in particular for artists such as Greuze, Watteau and Fragonard. The taste therefore was a continental and cosmopolitan one, and the English Rothschild family probably encountered the works in collections and art markets of Europe during their frequent foreign trips. In addition the family undoubtedly knew of Hertford and frequently lent similar items in their collections to the same exhibitions as he did.⁹⁴

The English Rothschild family and the French Rococo-revival style: conclusion

The English Rothschild family filled their residences with French eighteenth-century decorative objects and furniture from the 1850s onwards. The interiors were marked with an intensity of tone, a sense of luxury and extravagance. The family members were some

⁹² The National Gallery for example neglected such works and instead only French seventeenth-century artists such as Claude and Nicolas Poussin were represented in the collection in the early-nineteenth century

⁹³ Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collection in England and France* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), p. 54.

⁹⁴ For example loan exhibitions at Burlington House in the later part of the nineteenth century.

of the first collectors to build on the early and speculative examples of Francophile modes of display employed by aristocratic individuals. Yet they amassed greater numbers of French objects and furnished entire rooms more extravagantly and comprehensively in the French eighteenth-century style than earlier aristocratic collectors (for example at Mentmore House from 1855 and Aston Clinton House in the mid- to late-1850s). Indeed they did so at a time when such tastes were not yet universally fashionable, and in fact viewed somewhat unfavourably by a large proportion of leading collectors and the upper classes in Britain.

The Rothschild family's interest in the French Rococo style and continental decorative arts was driven by a combination of all the factors discussed above: indeed writing in 1892 Ferdinand suggested the French eighteenth-century revival style was one highly suitable for the age, which could be both comfortable and extravagant, and which held associations with aristocratic taste and refinement.⁹⁵ The family were certainly drawn to French eighteenth-century decorative arts for their unparalleled quality: in selecting any object for their country residences they sought the best examples, and for them the best was the art of France of the eighteenth century. Ferdinand considered in 1892 that 'whilst on the Continent art on the whole had decayed, it flourished in France in the eighteenth century more profusely than during any other epoch of her history'.⁹⁶ Most importantly however the family chose to employ French eighteenth-century furnishings and objects in their country residences to evoke an extravagant and visibly opulent atmosphere, undoubtedly as symbols of their wealth and already powerful social status. Furthermore there were no political undertones in the family's choice of the style: they had no reason to employ it out of support for the *Ancien Régime* or aristocracy: instead the reasons were more material and immediate, and focussed on their position as *nouveau-riche* individuals expressing their wealth, European connections, interest in the historical, and strong social position.

⁹⁵ Rothschild, 'French Eighteenth Century Art in England', 375-390.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The English Rothschild family and their mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury: further stylistic and collecting trends

The collecting of *objets d'art* in the nineteenth century

In order to further place the English Rothschild family's collecting preferences in context it is necessary to consider any general trends in the collecting of *objets d'art* in the nineteenth century. This will help to identify if the family were unique or pioneering in collecting the objects they did, and in creating a particular kind of aesthetic in their country mansions,

The desire to own antique *objets d'art* (especially items made of porcelain or bronze) became widespread by the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain and the market for such objects developed rapidly. Interest in *objets d'art* of the Renaissance increased significantly after about 1870. As Reitlinger observes there was a 'vigorous market for certain objects of the High Renaissance, almost rivalling the market for classical antiquities'.⁹⁷ French and Italian Renaissance objects were popular (as they had been in the latter part of the eighteenth century): desirable items included medieval reliquaries or ivories, Limoges enamels, French or Italian rock crystals, Palissy ware, Majolica, and French faience porcelain.⁹⁸ The great political and social upheavals which occurred on the Continent at this time had a great deal to do with the rise in interest in French Renaissance items. This was further encouraged by Parisian dealers in the 1870s and 80s.⁹⁹ The chief market for these articles in this period was London. When for example the Comte de Neuwerkerke (Napoleon II's Superintendant of Fine Arts) decided in 1871 to sell his collection of armour and French Renaissance furniture and *objets d'art* a buyer was found in London: Sir Richard Wallace. Such an example was frequently repeated. German Renaissance silver was also highly prized by many collectors, encouraged by auctions of the possessions of the House of Hanover in 1827 and 1843.¹⁰⁰ Politician Ralph Bernal (1783-1854) was one of the first English collectors to show an interest in such items on a large scale and was quickly joined by other like-minded connoisseurs.

⁹⁷ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 116.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

In addition the prices of French eighteenth-century objects rose to a high level in Britain during the nineteenth century. By the 1820s such articles frequently passed through the sale rooms at similar prices to those paid for them by the French aristocracy when new.¹⁰¹ Sèvres porcelain dominated this market and these objects (especially the monumental Sèvres chimney-piece garnitures) were by far the costliest antique *objets d'art* of the time.¹⁰² The demand was largely met with importations from France. As noted the Prince Regent acquired many examples of individual Sèvres items and full services in the late-eighteenth century (now part of the Royal Collection) and he continued this taste as George IV. This revealed his interest in French items of the eighteenth-century (and indeed his influence on the rise in their popularity). By the mid-nineteenth century prices for French eighteenth-century objects rose still further: this was greatly owing to the influence and fierce competition of several rival collectors such as the 4th Marquess of Herford and Mayer de Rothschild. Such individuals desired the highest quality and most showy pieces, being frequently preoccupied with owning complete chimney-piece garnitures or matching sets.¹⁰³ Eighteenth-century French sculpture (for example bronze works) was similarly appreciated by collectors who amassed Sèvres porcelain and eighteenth-century French furniture. At the death of the 4th Marquess of Hertford however prices for these French eighteenth-century items began to fall, though Reitlinger believes it was still considered the 'perfection of drawing room art'.¹⁰⁴

In addition there was a strong market for original (or imitation) tapestries and soft furnishings in the eighteenth-century style. The most admired textile hangings were those dating to the reign of Louis XIV (who had founded the royal Gobelins factory in 1662). Such tapestries (and those from the reign of Louis XV) reached high prices from the late-eighteenth century onwards as country house owners wished to include them in their Rococo-revival interiors.¹⁰⁵ Carpets from the royal Savonniere factory were also highly desirable, largely for their connections to the *Ancien Régime*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 255 -257.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 255.

Schatzkammer collections

Most English Rothschild family members displayed a great number of objects of the Renaissance in their residences of the Vale of Aylesbury.¹⁰⁶ Hall has suggested that the Rothschild collections of *Schatzkammer* objects were one of the areas where 'their taste was innovative and dramatically different to English taste'.¹⁰⁷ Hall concedes that 'some Englishmen had shown a passing interest' (for example the Prince Regent and William Beckford at Fonthill) but that the English Rothschilds were creating collections that others were not. This view however must be modified: indeed the English Rothschild family were not unique or unusual in this period in creating such collections, in fact there was a revival of interest in the *Kunstammer* or *Schatzkammer* in the nineteenth-century and these items were readily available to purchase.

Dora Thornton has shown that the taste of Englishmen for objects under the *Schatzkammer* heading has far older roots than the early-nineteenth century: Sir Andrew Fountaine of Narford Hall, Norfolk, for example owned a collection, and Horace Walpole collected many for his house at Strawberry Hill.¹⁰⁸ Indeed Reitlinger comments that

the Christie's sales from 1766 onwards show a number of their sales of London jewellers' stocks abounded with Renaissance objects of all kinds, and in which medieval objects were not unknown...The same objects are even to be found in the numerous catalogues of the house sales of the period.

He also notes that 'an image emerges at the turn of the century of a moment of transition in taste...a vigorous market for certain objects of the High Renaissance, almost rivalling the market for classical antiquities'.¹⁰⁹

Demand for these objects developed rapidly during the course of the nineteenth century and although many were still relatively cheap, prices rose significantly from the 1840s onwards. The market was lively and sales of collections with high proportions of

¹⁰⁶ These included for example silver, silver-gilt, enamels, ivories, mother-of-pearl, rock crystals and hardstones, mounted tusks, horns, shells and nuts, Renaissance jewels, snuff boxes, Venetian and Flemish glass, majolica, Palissy and Henri II wares.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Hall, 'The English Rothschilds as Collectors', in *The Rothschilds: Essays on the History of a European Family*, ed. by Georg Heuberger (Frankfurt: Thorbecke/Boydell and Brewer, 1994), 265-285.

¹⁰⁸ Dora Thornton, 'Painted enamels of Limoges in the Wernher Collection', *Apollo*, 483 (May 2002), 10-16.

¹⁰⁹ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II*, p. 55.

Schatzkammer objects were frequent, probably encouraging a general public interest. Many of the objects which appeared in the great sale at Stowe in 1848 of the collections of the 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos for example were in this taste (including Renaissance and pseudo-Renaissance furniture, sixteenth-century silver, ivories and jewellery).¹¹⁰ Ralph Bernal amassed one of the finest large-scale English collections of this type: an attempt to secure the items for the nation at his death failed and instead an outstanding sale of 4,300 lots took place, realising between £60,000 and £70,000.¹¹¹ A similar example was the collection of Scottish marine engineer Robert Napier who had amassed a large quantity of gold and silversmiths' work, ivories, crystals and decorative plate from the 1830s onwards: a catalogue of the collection was published in 1865.¹¹² Furthermore the collection of medieval enamels, goldsmiths work, rock crystals, ivory carvings and medieval glassware formed by the merchant Hollingworth Magniac also stands as an example of an Englishman's committed interest in *Schatzkammer* items. Magniac's collection was also published in a catalogue of 1862.¹¹³ Finally the businessman Sir Julius Charles Wernher, 1st Baronet, assembled a collection of European objects in a variety of media for his 'Red Room' of his London townhouse in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁴

It is clear that certain wealthy collectors in Britain began to acquire objects of the Medieval and Renaissance period and construct neo-*Kunstammer* collections in the nineteenth century. The desire to own such antique *objets d'art* became widespread by the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain and the market for them developed rapidly. The chief market for these objects was London. As Thornton suggests this revival of interest in the *Schatzkammer* may have been part of the 'early nineteenth century interest in the art and culture of earlier periods which followed on the heels of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars'.¹¹⁵ Thornton also identifies that there were factors specific to this period which drew collectors towards *Schatzkammer* objects in particular. Firstly it was part of the general increasing tendency in the nineteenth century to recall specific historical periods in

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

¹¹¹ *Christie's Auction Catalogue, The celebrated collection of works of art from the Byzantine period to that of Louis Seize of that distinguished collector Ralph Bernal* (London: Christie & Manson, 5 March 1855).

¹¹² J.C. Robinson, *Notice of works of art, having relation to the Emperor Charles V, in the collection of Robert Napier, Esq., of West Shandon* (London: Chiswick Press, 1871)

¹¹³ J.C. Robinson, *Notice of the principal works of art in the collection of Hollingworth Magniac, esq. of Colworth* (London: Cundall, Downes, 1862).

¹¹⁴ Julius Bryant, 'The Wernher Collection at Ranger's House', *Apollo*, 483 (May 2007), 3-9.

¹¹⁵ Dora Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstammer* of the nineteenth century', *Silver Studies* (2008), 57-67.

collecting. Secondly the collapse of France, the capture of the French Emperor and the occupation of France by Prussia had a great deal to do with the renewed interest and a patriotic and romantic taste for French Renaissance items which was exploited by Parisian dealers of the 1870s and 80s.¹¹⁶ As part of a general movement to discredit the French Revolution, 'French people started to look back nostalgically to a more distant past', which included the objects associated with earlier French dynasties such as the Valois.¹¹⁷ Such nostalgia was frequently repeated: a taste for German Renaissance silver for example was highly prized and encouraged by the auctions of the possessions of the House of Hanover in 1827 and 1843.¹¹⁸ Thirdly the interest was fuelled by a literary enthusiasm (initiated and encouraged by authors such as Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott), as well as by the work of contemporary painters (such as Richard Parkes Bonington and Eugène Delacroix).¹¹⁹ Fourthly the supply of these objects was plentiful as the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars had brought a great deal to the art market in London and Paris: this in turn further stimulated interest in them.

Finally interest may have been stimulated by increased opportunities to view these objects. Some of the last surviving German princely *Kunstammer* collections were being opened to the public in this period: for example the Gotha *Kunstammer* which was made open to view from 1825, and the Green Vaults of Dresden which from 1850 provided guided tours. In Britain such opportunities also increased after about 1850: a great many *Schatzkammer* objects were included in exhibitions such as that held at the Society of Arts in London in 1850 for example. The important Soulages decorative art collection (formed by Jules Soulages of Toulouse between 1830 and 40) was purchased by a group of subscribers for £11,000 and exhibited at Marlborough House in 1856, then sold to the Manchester Exhibition Committee. The aforementioned Robert Napier lent a great deal of his *Schatzkammer* collection to the Manchester Art Treasures exhibition of 1857 and the inclusion of Renaissance Venetian glass in the event was 'enthusiastically remarked upon in the catalogue'.¹²⁰ Finally the International Exhibition of 1862 in South Kensington reflected the increased interest in these items: large displays were devoted to 'decorative works in metal of the medieval and more recent periods', 'gold and silver plate', 'carvings

¹¹⁶ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II The Rise and Fall of Objets d'art Prices Since 1750*, p. 110.

¹¹⁷ Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-Kunstammer of the nineteenth century', 57-67.

¹¹⁸ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II The Rise and Fall of Objets d'art Prices Since 1750*, p. 113.

¹¹⁹ Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-Kunstammer of the nineteenth century', 57-67.

¹²⁰ Susanne Higgott, *The Wallace Collection: catalogue of glass and Limoges painted enamels* (London: Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 2011).

in ivory' and 'bronzes'; there were 276 examples of Limoges enamels alone. Public Museums also began to follow the movement towards a greater interest in Renaissance and Medieval objects. Cole began to purchase such items from the 1850s for the South Kensington Museum: joined by Robinson he sought to add to the museum's holdings of older works (Renaissance sculpture, majolica and metalwork) and the two travelled regularly to the continent to take advantage of the opportunities to collect first hand. A.W. Franks (Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography at the British Museum) was highly instrumental in developing the collection of British antiquities for the British Museum; in particular he was responsible for acquiring the finest items from the Bernal collection.

This interest in Renaissance items by the English Rothschild family can be seen as a recognition of their German roots and their sustained continental connections. They were well placed with their continental connections to make decidedly non-English choices in the kind of object they collected. An interest in medieval and Renaissance works of art was common to the majority of the Rothschild family members all over Europe: this was a tradition of collecting for the family that was highly developed by the 1850s. The antiquarian activities of the Rothschild family's founder Mayer Amschel Rothschild were particularly influential: he often dealt in precious Medieval and Renaissance objects and produced catalogues of the items he handled in regular intervals from 1771 onwards.¹²¹ It is also likely that the inspiration and encouragement in collecting in this field grew from the close relations which the family had with the Crown Prince of Hesse-Kassel.¹²² Mayer Amschel's activities in this area appear to have been very influential on the formation of certain of the collections of his descendants. The recent work of Mark Meadows has particularly highlighted that the Rothschilds' interest in these objects grew from their German mercantile background.¹²³ Meadows suggests the Rothschild family were continuing the tradition of German traders, merchants and bankers of the early-sixteenth century who created collections of natural and handmade wonders during their mercantile dealings, amassing items of portable wealth that acted as evidence of power and status as well as a source of money (such as for example the Fugger family).

¹²¹ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector', p. 177.

¹²² See Constant von Wurzbach, *Bibliographisches Lexicon* (Vienna, 1867), Vol.6, pp.233-235. See also Johann Philip, Freiherr von Bethmann, "Er kannte keine grossere Wonne als Wohltun": Mayer Amschel Rothschild' in *Die Grossen Frankfurter*, ed. by Hans Sarkowicz (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1994).

¹²³ See Mark Meadows, 'Merchants and Marvels: Hans Jacob Fugger and the origins of the *Wunderkammer*, in *Merchants and Marvels: commerce and the representation of nature*, ed. by Paula Filden and Pamela Smith (New York; London: Routledge, 2002).

Once again the accumulation of Renaissance objects by the English Rothschild family assisted in the creation of a particular mode of presentation in their mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury: this must have been a factor in encouraging their enthusiasm for them. The richness and variety of the objects created an atmosphere of wealth and luxury, one which drew attention to the status, affluence and sophistication of the owner. Yet the impression of luxury and opulence created by the collections of such Renaissance items was notably different to that created by the Rothschilds' interest in Rococo styles and objects: this was a highly aristocratic and fashionable taste, one which was far older than the eighteenth-century. This tradition also had its roots in an appreciation by the family of the market value of these items, and therefore their investment potential.¹²⁴ Unlike Renaissance *Schatzkammern* these nineteenth-century collections did not contain items from the natural world, from other world cultures, or 'curiosities': the objects instead were restricted to ones usually with 'high intrinsic worth'.

Chinese porcelain

An interest was shown by certain English Rothschilds, those of the third generation, for eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain objects (including cisterns, jars and vases). These objects were shown at Halton House and Tring Park House in the late nineteenth-century. They were highly decorative and ornate, and some were mounted with eighteenth-century-style ormolu plinths and handles. Such objects added to the sense of opulence and wealth that the interiors of these two Rothschild mansions conveyed. Alfred's father Lionel and uncles Mayer and Anthony do not seem to have been attracted to such items. Yet this was not an unusual taste for Alfred and Nathaniel to have at this time. These objects were highly regarded and studied by art connoisseurs and certain other *nouveau-riche* individuals also took an interest in them. Most notably perhaps was Alfred Morrison (1821-1897), second son of businessman James Morrison. His father's collections had included some fine Chinese and Japanese pieces but Alfred Morrison created a vast collection of such items. In 1861 he managed to acquire over 1000 pieces of eighteenth-century porcelain of exceptional quality from Henry Brougham Loch (1827-1900) who had recently returned from service in the Second Opium War in china.¹²⁵ This purchase appears to have encouraged Morrison's interest in such objects and spent £40,000 in the five years

¹²⁴ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 50.

¹²⁵ Dakers, *A Genius for Money*, p. 279.

following purchasing another 1000 bowls, vases and plates, often through the dealers Henry and George Durlacher who were the major dealers in Chinese porcelain of the time.¹²⁶

Conclusion

It has been shown in this chapter that the tastes of the English Rothschild family in interior decoration and collecting did not differ dramatically from existing nineteenth-century trends. In general their preferences were neither a rebuke nor modification to the established styles favoured by the landed classes, but rather an endorsement and elaboration. The traditional canons of tastes of the family are revealed by the fact that, unlike some other *nouveau-riche* individuals, the English Rothschilds did not abandon Old Master works to support *parvenu* tastes for contemporary works.

English Rothschild family members did not initiate entirely new fashions yet they were on occasion amongst the leaders of changes to modes of collecting and display, for example in collecting English eighteenth-century paintings. Most visibly in their enthusiastic preference for Francophile styles and objects the Rothschild family led the growing fashion for a more lavish and opulent use of this style in the second-half of the nineteenth century – one which was employed as a means of displaying wealth, opulence, and continental links, rather than to reveal any political or aristocratic allegiance. Furthermore the family, with so much money at their disposal and being so publicly visible, encouraged certain fashions to develop further and gather speed (for example the popularity of antique *boiseries*).

In demonstrating their cultural acuity, education and financial means through the purchase and display of certain art objects in very particular settings, the English Rothschild family were emphasising their social position. As Hannah Rothschild (daughter of the 4th Lord Rothschild) notes ‘having matter made them feel like they did matter’.¹²⁷ Mayer, his brother Anthony and their nephews Alfred, Leopold and Ferdinand showed they could possess great numbers of the most opulent objects and create lavish interiors in which to entertain

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Rothschild, *The Baroness*, p. 62.

the best of society in their houses in the Vale of Aylesbury. They wanted the trappings of wealth to further assure their position as one of the leading *nouveau-riche* families in Britain. Furthermore perhaps by buying up items connected with the greatest aristocratic and royal families of Europe, they could link themselves to the prestigious dynasties of many generations past, even if they could only trace their ancestry back to the eighteenth-century Jewish ghetto of Frankfurt.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

Chapter Six

Contemporary Collectors and Collections

In the decoration of their country houses in the Vale of Aylesbury, and in the type of decorative objects they collected the English Rothschild family shared several common tastes and similar preferences. Broadly this included a preference for acquiring Old Master paintings, French eighteenth-century furniture and objects as well as Renaissance *Schatzkammer* objects. In addition many members of the family admired French and English eighteenth-century paintings. In most of the residences the French eighteenth-century style was recreated in certain rooms (or in the case of Halton House for example in all of the rooms) and French eighteenth-century objects were present in abundance. Ferdinand de Rothschild certainly believed it was his family who had driven the revival of the fashion for this style:

It is true that in one respect my family have assisted in developing a new departure. From the fall of the old regime in France until the beginning of the Second Empire the style of the internal decoration of French houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was contemned or ignored. In England, the early Italian, the Queen Anne, or no style, had long been preferred; pictures, cabinets, china of all kinds being usually placed on a damask or plain coloured background....Whether it is to the credit of my family or not may be a matter of opinion, but the fact remains that they first revived the decoration of the eighteenth century in its purity, reconstructing their rooms out of old material, reproducing them as they had been during the reigns of the Louis...¹

Caution however must be applied when considering if the English Rothschild family's preferences in collecting and interior display were unique or entirely original. Indeed there were other contemporary collectors who were collecting the same objects as the family in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and there were other country house interiors presented in the same taste. The preceding chapter has identified that English Rothschild family members were not necessarily leaders in fields of collecting and taste in the nineteenth century, but rather often encouraged existing trends to develop further (all be it with vast resources and a unique European network of contacts).

¹ Waddesdon Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

As well as emulating the collecting style of their immediate Rothschild cousins and other relatives in France and Germany, and competing with them, the English Rothschilds encountered many other rivals and leaders in the areas in which they preferred to collect. They were not the only individuals to be so interested in the objects they coveted, and certainly were not the first in Britain to be collecting them. As Ferdinand de Rothschild notes when the wider Rothschild family began collecting such objects 'Lord Hertford, the Messrs. Mills, the Messrs Baring, Mr Magniac and many others in England, while M. Debruges, Count Portalès, Prince Soltykoff, M. Roger, M. Thiers and Prince Demidoff in France were already contending with each other in the auction room.'² Many of these men initiated or followed a fashion for truly international collecting on a grand scale, a trait which was so characteristic of the English Rothschild family's taste in the nineteenth century. The collecting activity of the English Rothschild family was of a highly European style, and they were part of an international collecting network. In order to set the English Rothschilds' collections and collecting activities into context and to explore further if their tastes were as original as is sometimes supposed they must be compared to other collectors of the time.

George IV as Prince Regent and King

As Prince Regent and King, George IV was a highly influential figure in the world of collecting in the first three decades of the nineteenth-century in Britain. His influence on taste and style of the period was significant, and is illustrated by the fact he was the originator of the vastly popular Regency style in Britain.³ The enthusiasm that George IV (as Prince Regent and as King) showed for French furniture and porcelain from about 1815 was significant to the development of the French Rococo-revival style in Britain in the nineteenth century. Ferdinand de Rothschild considered George IV the most influential of collectors in encouraging the Rococo or Louis-revival style in Britain in the first-half of the nineteenth century, writing in his memoirs that 'the acclimation of French art might have been only temporary had not the Prince Regent...settled its destiny in this country'.⁴ The interest in these objects and style shown by the Rothschild family later in the century was not therefore new or unique.

² Ibid.

³ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures'.

⁴ Rothschild, 'French Eighteenth Century Art in England', 375-390.

The preference for George IV for the Francophile style was apparent from an early age and was fostered by his knowledge and interest in the language and history of France. He had many French friends and acquaintances, including members of the royal family, ministers and aristocrats, as well as architects, designers, artists and collectors. So it was that George IV bought many French art objects and items of furniture from the 1790s to the 1820s (at auction and through dealers). The King was less inclined to collect these objects for private reasons, and instead wished to display the objects in his residences and usually purchased items which were flamboyant and luxurious. They were more often 'conceived as forming part of his lavish and constantly changing schemes of interior decoration'.⁵

As Prince and King, George IV also built up a significant collection of *Schatzkammer* objects at Carlton House, London: these were often rare (and usually sumptuous and highly decorative) silver pieces. Furthermore his admiration for Dutch and Flemish Old Master paintings encouraged a sustained interest in such works in Britain, and reflected his admiration for recent French taste. These objects complemented his collections of French eighteenth-century furniture and decorative arts. This interest in Dutch art was a highly developed, refined and 'professionalised' taste.⁶ At Carlton House 100 of the 170 pictures owned by the Prince were of the Dutch and Flemish schools and included artists such as David Teniers, Jan Steen, Gerrit Dou, Frans van Mieris, Gabriel Metsu, Willem van de Velde, Jan van der Heyden, Philip Wouvermans and Adriaen van Ostade.

The Regency style of interior decoration which George IV as Prince Regent was key in developing was imitated by many collectors, and has many features in common with the style which the English Rothschild family chose to employ in their country residences. Generally walls would be 'richly coloured, hung with brocaded silk' and floors provided with gold, patterned close-fitted carpets. Soft furnishings were mainly in the French style, displayed uniformity in colour, and included thick elaborate and luxurious fabrics. Such schemes would also feature mirrors in abundance, usually built in to the architectural fittings. These fittings might have Neoclassical elements and provided settings into which

⁵ Geoffrey de Bellaigue, *French Porcelain in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, 3 vols (London: Royal Collection Enterprises, 2009), I, p. 10.

⁶ Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *Dutch Landscapes* (Royal Collection Publications, 2011).

paintings would be hung.⁷ These pictures were considered as the primary collection, but objects such as porcelain, glass lustres and marble-topped furniture were also expected to form part of the decorative schemes, and were selected to match and complement the ensemble.⁸ Generally also there was a marked use of ormolu which added to the overall luxury of the schemes. Such interiors could be highly expensive and often a full recreation of this style was limited to only the very wealthy. George IV employed Sir Jeffry Wyattville (1766-1840) to remodel Windsor Castle. Here he recreated Rococo Francophile interiors as settings for the large amounts of French 'treasures' the King collected. The Grand Reception Rooms featured a set of Louis XV *boiseries* which had been acquired in 1826 from the French dealer Delahante; a set of Gobelins tapestries were framed by them.

The King's collections and the style of the interiors he created in his residences were highly publicised and fellow connoisseurs and the general public could read about them or view elements from them in public exhibitions (such as at the British Institution, Royal Academy and the Manchester Art Treasures exhibition).⁹ The 1826 British Institution exhibition was entirely devoted to the Dutch and Flemish works in the collection of George IV (164 in total). The King also surrounded himself with other collectors who shared his tastes (for example George Capel-Coningsby 5th Earl of Essex [1757-1839], Edward Lascelles 1st Earl of Harewood [1740-1820], George John Spencer 2nd Earl Spencer [1758-1834], and Francis Charles Seymour-Conway 3rd Marquess of Hertford [1777-1842]). An 'ardent band of Francophiles open to French ideas and eager to follow French fashions' therefore grew up around him, sharing his ideas, offering advice for his purchases as well as acting as rivals in the art market.¹⁰

The English Rothschild family were not acquainted with George IV but, as Michael Hall highlights, they shared a 'common German heritage' and their tastes were 'derived from similar traditions' (as prince George IV had been the Crown Prince of Hanover and from

⁷ *Carlton House: the past glories of George IV's palace*, ed. by J. Harris, O. Millar and G. de Bellaigue (London: The Royal Collection, 1991), pp. 9-36; Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures'.

⁸ *Carlton House*, ed. by Harris, Millar and de Bellaigue, pp. 9-36; John Cornforth, 'The Roots of Regency Taste', *Country Life*, 185, no. 17 (1991), 74-77; Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures'.

⁹ Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation: exhibitions and the London public, 1747-2001* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 30.

¹⁰ Geoffrey de Bellaigue, *Wallace Collection Monographs: Preferences in French Furniture* (London: Trustees of the Wallace Collections, 1979), p. 10.

1820 King of Hanover).¹¹ There were however different motives behind the actions of George IV and the Rothschild family in pursuing the above tastes. The King and his circle of followers adopted the Francophile style out of an interest in (and probably a wish to imitate) the style of the *Ancien Régime*, creating a particularly aristocratic aesthetic. As will be discussed the English Rothschild family were not seeking to create distinctly aristocratic interiors in an attempt to mask their *nouveau-riche* background; instead the interiors and collections they created were of a highly European, plutocratic taste: luxurious, opulent and expensive.

The 3rd and 4th Marquess of Hertford

The Marquesses of Hertford were also a major influence in the growth of popularity and continued support of the Francophile style in British interiors in the nineteenth century, again revealing the Rothschild family were not as pioneering in their choice of interiors and collections as is sometimes supposed. Francis Charles Seymour-Conway, 3rd Marquess of Hertford (1777-1842) was the close friend and confidant of George IV as Prince Regent and was appointed Vice-Chamberlain in 1812. The Prince and Lord Hertford shared similar tastes in the arts and the latter often acted as the Prince's agent in auction sales or with dealers. Lord Hertford considered collecting a 'deeply important activity', and his taste focussed on highly-finished Dutch genre paintings and French eighteenth-century *objets d'art* and furniture.¹² The influence of the Prince Regent on Hertford's tastes can be seen in his interest in bronzes, Boulle furniture and Sèvres porcelain, possibly also in his acquisition of grand-scale Dutch and Flemish Old Master works.

Richard Seymour-Conway, 4th Marquess of Hertford (1800-1870) was equally, if not more, interested in collecting than his father and has been called the 'greatest English rival of the Rothschilds'.¹³ The similarities between his tastes and those of the English Rothschilds for Old Master paintings and decorative objects of the eighteenth-century are remarkable. The 4th Marquess lived a reclusive life in Paris where he was able to acquire vast quantities of works of art 'on a spectacular scale', with the 'possession of immense wealth, to gratify these tastes'.¹⁴ It was this European background and residence which made this

¹¹ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures'.

¹² Peter Hughes, *The Founders of the Wallace Collection* (London: Wallace Collection Trustees, 1992), p. 16.

¹³ Michael Hall, 'Bric-a-Brac: a Rothschild's Memoir of Collecting', *Apollo Magazine*, 166 (2007), 50-77.

¹⁴ A.L. Baldry, *The Wallace Collection at Hertford House* (London: Manzi, Joyant & Co., 1904), p. 30.

Englishman's collection so continental in nature. This is one of the major reasons why his collections were so comparable to that of the English Rothschilds whose collecting activities were highly influenced by their travel, their European relatives, and their ability to participate in the art markets beyond Britain.

Frank Herrmann finds that Lord Hertford was 'so engrossed by his interest in art and the enlargement of his collection that he took little interest in anything else'; an author of 1904 remarked that 'systematic collecting became the one occupation of his life.'¹⁵ Ferdinand de Rothschild was highly interested in him and made the following observation:

It may be questioned whether his love of art did not degenerate into mania and whether he went on amassing pictures, furniture and china, for the pleasure their possession gave him in artistic sense, or from less creditable motives. He never saw many of the objects his agents purchased as they were forwarded from the place they were bought direct to Manchester House, and for several years before his death he did not set foot in London; while of those he personally acquired a great number at once piled up in the lumber room.¹⁶

Ferdinand criticised Hertford in both his *Reminiscences* and in an article for the *Nineteenth Century* journal. He noted he was 'the most ideal and the most gigantic collector of modern times...an insatiable glutton for art'.¹⁷ He observed that Hertford 'took a perverse pleasure in outbidding his friends', wryly concluding 'Rivalry Lord Hertford would not brook; competition he sneered at'.¹⁸

Lord Hertford was praised in 1904 in an early guide to the Wallace Collection for his 'undeniable capacity for connoisseurship', and 'well cultivated opinions'.¹⁹ Ferdinand conceded that it was Hertford's unique and 'peculiar faculties' which enabled him to build up his remarkable collection and noted his 'perfect judgment and exquisite taste'.²⁰ The majority of the paintings which he bought were seventeenth-century Old Master works (by artists such as Gerard ter Borch, Gabriel Metsu, Pieter de Hooch, Paul Potter, Jan Steen

¹⁵ *The English as Collectors: a documentary chrestomathy*, ed. by Frank Hermann (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972), p. 282; Baldry, *The Wallace Collection at Hertford House*, p. 30.

¹⁶ Waddesdon Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Rothschild, 'French Eighteenth Century Art in England', 375-390.

¹⁹ Baldry, *The Wallace Collection at Hertford House*, p. 40.

²⁰ Rothschild, 'French Eighteenth Century Art in England', 375-390.

and Adriaen van de Velde). As one author noted 'hardly anyone of acknowledged eminence was absent from the list'.²¹ He favoured genre scenes, meticulous townscapes, romantic landscapes and military scenes. Such a taste was typical for the mid-nineteenth century and was very similar to those of Lionel de Rothschild and his sons.

Hertford however was innovative for the time in his interest in French paintings: he began collecting works by such artists as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, François Boucher, Jean-Antoine Watteau or Jean-Baptiste Greuze in the 1840s, a time at which these artists were not widely admired. An author of 1904 suggested an explanation for this: 'it is only natural that the men who entered so fully into the spirit of the nation with which they were associated for many years, should be fully responsive to the spell exercised by the art of that country'.²² By 1859 Hertford owned 16 works by Greuze (which grew to over 25 by his death), 15 by Boucher (over 30 by his death), six by Watteau, nine by Lancret, and four by Pater (collectively those by Watteau, Pater and Lancret probably rose to around 40 by his death). No other English collector showed such an interest in the works of Boucher and Fragonard at this time. Hertford often paid great prices for such works: for example in 1865 he purchased the *Laughing Cavalier* by Frans Hals for more than six times the sales estimate, outbidding many other interested parties, including the French James de Rothschild (1792-1868). Reitlinger feels this had been a 'millionaires escapade' and notes that the price he paid was a 'full 15 years ahead of its time'.²³ As has been noted a taste for such objects was exhibited by Mayer de Rothschild at Mentmore House and Alfred de Rothschild at Halton House, but for Mayer only after 1850, and for Alfred from the 1880s onwards.

As in the case of the Rothschild family the interest of Hertford in the French eighteenth century extended to furnishings, furniture and *objets d'art*. His collection of Sèvres porcelain was reported to be 'among the finest in the world' and rivalled that of Alfred de Rothschild.²⁴ Hertford also built up around three hundred miniatures from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, most of which were by French artists, comparable to Mayer de Rothschild's at Mentmore House. He complemented his collection of French eighteenth-century paintings with French eighteenth-century furniture (prizing those pieces which

²¹ Baldry, *The Wallace Collection at Hertford House*, p. 40.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²³ Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume I*, p. 155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

belonged to the French royal family) and a number of Beauvais and Gobelins tapestries. Like the Rothschilds, Hertford's collections also contained Italian majolica, Limoges enamels, ivories, works in marble, Italian, French and Flemish 'bronzes of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', snuff boxes, garnitures, candelabras, and 'ornamental objects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'.²⁵ There were very few medieval objects, and 'no religious statues, no carvings in freestone or wood, no fragments of architectural or monumental sculpture'.²⁶

As the Rothschild family did, Hertford employed dealers to work on his behalf in sale rooms (often in secret) and agents to seek out the best works (most notably Samuel Mawson in London, and increasingly his illegitimate son Richard Wallace). Certain dealers which appear in his account books also appear in those of the Rothschilds, once more a factor which encouraged the collections of Lord Hertford and the Rothschild family to appear so similar.²⁷ He could be a fierce and competitive collector, and with an annual income of around £250,000 nothing was beyond his reach financially. As Peter Hughes suggests 'only Rothschild fortunes could offer serious competition'.²⁸ Yet Hertford was still a significant rival to the family's collecting efforts: Ferdinand de Rothschild noted that 'no competitor could stand in his way'.²⁹ Nathaniel de Rothschild wrote to his brothers in 1843 declaring that Hertford 'buys up everything and spoils the market'.³⁰ Nathaniel also reported that their cousin Mayer Carl de Rothschild (1820-1886) had struggled in his pursuit of works of art in the face of 'mighty competitors like Lord Hertford [who]...give enormous prices to secure the best lots'.³¹ When Mayer Carl went to Rome to view the paintings from the collection of Cardinal Joseph Fesch (1763-1839), Napoleon's maternal uncle, in 1845 he wrote to Lionel de Rothschild that 'I will be [only] too happy to attend to your commissions, but I am afraid there will be little chance for it, Ld. Hertford having made his appearance with the full intention of securing all the best pictures'.³²

The collecting habits of Lord Hertford and the English Rothschild family however, whilst having much in common, were not identical. Hertford certainly collected the same

²⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁷ For example Durlacher brothers, Louis-Auguste-Alfred Beurdeley, and Charles Davis.

²⁸ Hughes, *The Founders of the Wallace Collection*, p. 16.

²⁹ Waddesdon Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

³⁰ RAL, XI/109/45B/6/127, Nathaniel, Paris, to brothers, undated (1843).

³¹ RAL, XI/109/79/5, Nathaniel, Paris, to brothers, 15 Jan 1850.

³² RAL, XI/109/51B/226, Mayer Charles, Vienna, to Lionel, 28 March 1845.

paintings, furniture and works of art that the Rothschild family did, but he also collected things they did not: for example contemporary paintings, arms and armour. Unlike the Rothschild family he displayed an interest in contemporary French works for example and purchased paintings from living artists such as Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Paul Delaroche, Jean-Louis Ernest Meissonier and Émile Jean-Horace Vernet.³³ More abstractly however he was markedly less inclined to think of the objects he purchased as contributing to a whole, as making up an ensemble in any of his residences. As Michael Hall highlights, his collection were 'never intended to be presented in a domestic setting, to be lived with'.³⁴ Hertford hoarded his objects, accumulated on a grand scale with no thoughts as to location or their use as furnishings, and did not intend for them to be admired and viewed by others in his home.³⁵ In addition Hertford did not focus his collecting efforts on the interiors of his country residences (for example Sudbourne Hall, Suffolk or Ragley Hall, Warwickshire) these were much less important than his London town house. Unlike the Rothschild family he did not live much of a rural life, preferring to live in Paris.

Sir Richard Wallace

The illegitimate son of the 4th Marquess of Hertford, Sir Richard Wallace (1818-1890), was also an influential collector of the nineteenth century and may have influenced, and been influenced by, the collecting activities of the Rothschild family. Wallace's tastes, as those of his father, were remarkably similar to those of the English Rothschild family (and indeed their continental relations). Before his father's death in 1870 Wallace lived in Paris with Lord Hertford's mother and brother: it was this European residence and access to continental markets and tastes which made his collecting so comparable to that of the Rothschilds.

Influenced by his father's passion for collecting Wallace began to compile a collection of his own during the 1840s and 50s, largely following his father's tastes. It included Old Master paintings and porcelain, ivories and bronzes of the French eighteenth-century and Renaissance period. Upon the death of his father Wallace inherited all of his property that

³³ Hughes, *The Founders of the Wallace Collection*, p. 16.

³⁴ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 375.

³⁵ John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of Pictures*, 4 vols (London: Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1985), Volume IV: Dutch and Flemish.

was not entailed: this included the art collections in Paris and London and several properties. Wallace further added to the collections, though he acquired little in the way of Old Master paintings or French eighteenth-century objects, revealing to Ferdinand de Rothschild that he felt 'unable to improve on their quality'.³⁶ Instead Wallace acquired objects to extend the chronological range of his father's collections so that it came to include not only seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works but also work of earlier periods. These included objects such as armour, Limoges enamels, rock crystal, ivory and goldsmiths' work. Wallace acquired several large collections *en bloc*: for example that of the Comte de Nieuwerkerke (1811-1892, surintendant des beaux-arts under Napoleon III) in 1871 for 400,000 francs, which brought much German late-fifteenth-century Gothic armour and Renaissance lures, bronzes, portrait medals, wax reliefs and Italian majolica to Wallace's collection; also in the same year he acquired the collection of sixteenth-century German and Italian arms and armour owned by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick (1786-1848).³⁷ Wallace's tastes however generally remained close to those of his father.

The Rothschild family and Wallace often coveted the same paintings and objects. A letter of 1875 reveals that Alfred de Rothschild offered some Sèvres pieces to Wallace in exchange for a painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, yet he declined the offer.³⁸ In his *Reminiscences* Ferdinand de Rothschild recalled that his uncle Lionel had been offered some 'fine old Italian plate' sometime in the early 1870s (including a 'richly chiselled gilt silver ewer and basin, present from Pope Clement to a Portuguese grandee'), but bemoaned that Lionel had declined the offer and instead the plate had been sold to Wallace.³⁹ Ferdinand regretfully wrote that had he known of his uncle's refusal, he would have purchased the item himself. The similarities between the Wallace Collection today and the collection of Ferdinand at Waddesdon Manor are striking, particularly in the choice of paintings and French eighteenth-century furniture and porcelain.

After his father's death Wallace returned to live in England and attempted to establish himself as a country gentleman, purchasing Sudbourne Hall in Suffolk from the 5th Marquess of Hertford (1812-1884) in 1871 and succeeding to the Hertford estates at Lisburn, Ulster, which constituency he represented as MP from 1873 to 1885. Ferdinand

³⁶ Waddesdon Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

³⁷ Hughes, *The Founders of the Wallace Collection*, p. 16.

³⁸ Wallace Collection Archive, AR2/251, Alfred de Rothschild to Sir Richard Wallace, March 1875.

³⁹ Waddesdon Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

de Rothschild noted that by the end of his life Wallace had blossomed out into an 'English baronet, a territorial magnate...and the guest of the Prince of Wales'.⁴⁰ Wallace was a well-known public figure and became a Trustee of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery and was a frequent lender to exhibitions (for example the Royal Academy shows). The Rothschild family were undoubtedly influenced by his collecting activities: Ferdinand de Rothschild was fascinated with Wallace (and his father) and went to great lengths to become acquainted with the former.⁴¹ Alfred de Rothschild also knew him, and was a particularly determined rival for the eighteenth-century *objets d'art* they both admired.

Upon his death Wallace left his collections to his wife Julie-Amélie-Charlotte Castelnau, Lady Wallace (1819-97), who in turn bequeathed them to the nation in 1897. Alfred de Rothschild in particular was pleased with this outcome, as a letter from Carl Meyer, 1st Baronet Shortgrove, attests:

Concerning Lady Wallace's will – she has left the contents of Hertford House to the nation...Of course everybody is very pleased at this magnificent legacy to the nation, nearly 800 priceless pictures, bronzes, furniture, miniatures, armour etc, and Alfred considers himself twice as rich as he was before because none of the Wallace things can ever come onto the market and depreciate his collection.⁴²



Figure 58: Wallace Collection, c. 2009

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Michael Hall, 'Bric-a-Brac: a Rothschild's Memoir of Collecting', *Apollo Magazine*, 166 (2007), 50-77.

⁴² Transcript of letters in the collection of Dr Tessa Murdoch, Carl Meyer to Adele Meyer, 24 February 1897.

As noted, Ferdinand de Rothschild asserted that it was George IV (as Prince Regent and King) and the Hertford family who had first initiated the taste in eighteenth-century Britain for French Rococo-revival interior styles and French eighteenth-century objects. Ferdinand however furthermore suggested the 4th Marquess of Hertford and his son Wallace had promoted the style through their collecting efforts and brought it into prominence and 'world-wide repute' with a 'new importance and fame' by the second-half of the nineteenth century.⁴³ Whilst the English Rothschild family must have contributed to the encouragement of the market and the enthusiasm for the style they were not unique in doing so therefore, and were certainly not the first. In his acquisition of French eighteenth-century paintings in the 1840, 50s and 60s the 4th Marquess of Hertford was revealing himself to be a highly innovative collector. The English Rothschild family only entered the collecting of these French works with any real intent in the 1850s and 60s.

As revealed here George IV, Lord Hertford and Wallace were additionally displaying an established British aristocratic tradition in the collecting of Old Master works of the Dutch and Flemish schools. There were many other high profile collectors acquiring these works throughout the nineteenth century, among them Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Landsdowne (1780-1863) and Admiral Algernon Percy, 4th Duke of Northumberland (1792-1865). The English Rothschilds were therefore not innovative in this taste either.

Other British aristocratic collectors

In addition to George IV and the Hertfords there were other important and highly influential British collectors of this period pursuing French eighteenth-century objects and fittings for their interiors. Amongst them were William Thomas Beckford (1760 – 1844), Alexander Douglas-Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton (1767-1852), Henry, 3rd Marquess of Landsdowne (1780-1863), and Richard Grenville, 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos (1797-1861). The collecting activities of these individuals may also have influenced the Rothschild family.

William Thomas Beckford (1760–1844), a novelist, art collector and critic, was reputed to be the richest commoner in England in the nineteenth century. He built Fonthill Abbey just outside Bath. Beckford shared the taste of George IV for French decorative arts and

⁴³ Waddesdon Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

Schatzkammer objects, though perhaps had less of an interest in Dutch and Flemish Old Master or contemporary paintings. He also collected many Italian works of the quattrocento, which were at this time little collected and therefore relatively cheap.⁴⁴ By 1822 Beckford was heavily in debt and determined to sell his mansion, Fonthill Splendens, and all of its contents. 72,000 copies of a Christie's illustrated catalogue were sold to advertise the sale and thousands attended the pre-sale view. The collection was sold before the sale began however to John Farquhar who at once auctioned the art and furnishings in the second Fonthill sale of 1823. Curiously Beckford himself and his son-in-law the 10th Duke of Hamilton re-purchased many items. The sales of 1822 and 1823 were highly publicised and known to the general public. Beckford's collecting tastes may have encouraged an interest in the French decorative arts and *Schatzkammer* objects amongst British collectors of the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps including the Rothschild family.

Alexander Douglas-Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton, (1767-1852) was a Scottish politician and well-known art collector. By the mid-nineteenth century he had built up an impressive collection of Old Master paintings at Hamilton Palace, Lanarkshire and several of the state rooms were influenced by the fashionable French Rococo style and contained some authentic eighteenth-century *boiseries*. The famous Hamilton Palace sale of 1882 was most magnificent: lasting 15 days the sum realised from pictures and *objets d'art* was £397,672.⁴⁵ The *Illustrated London News* commented that it had been a 'great sale of pictures, sculpture, Sèvres, Desden, Chinese and Japanese porcelain, decorative furniture, bronzes and works of ornamental art and fine materials.'⁴⁶ Hamilton himself was known to have bought a number of confiscated royal possessions in Paris in 1801 and 1814, and a few even as early as 1793. These now appeared in the sale and certain pieces bore the stamp of the *Garde Meuble*. On the third day of the sale three of these pieces with the cipher of Marie Antoinette and the signature of Riesener made £15,000 between them (in the course of just ten minutes' bidding). So close in taste were the Rothschilds' collections to those of the 10th Duke of Hamilton that no less than four family members were present at the sale.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Artists in his collection included Raphael, Giovanni Bellini, Andrea Mantegna, Filippino Lippi, Pietro Perugino and Luca Signorelli. Other artists' works included Rogier Van der Weyden, Velazquez, Gerrit Dou and Claude Lorrain.

⁴⁵ Perhaps about £2.5 million today.

⁴⁶ 'The Hamilton Place Sale, *The Illustrated London News*, 15 July 1882, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Including Ferdinand and Edmond de Rothschild.

European collectors

In addition to the examples of British collectors and connoisseurs noted above, there were certain international collectors who must be mentioned when discussing the English Rothschild family and their collections and interiors of their mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury. These contemporaries further illustrate that the English Rothschild family were not unique in their tastes, nor were they pioneering a style hitherto unknown in Britain.

The eighteenth-century Louis-revival style was given further impetus all over Europe with the official sanction of Eugénie de Montijo (1826-1920) during her time as Empress Consort of the French (1853-1871) and in exile in England from 1871-1920. Eugénie's promotion of the style from the 1850s onwards encouraged its adoption in many residences in Britain and beyond. Importantly, as Charles McCorquodale writes, it now became the 'accepted grand manner for the interiors of important public and private rooms of the rich from Vienna to New York'.⁴⁸ At Farnborough Hill, Hampshire, the Empress's residence from 1880-1920, and at Camden Place, Chislehurst, she displayed many of her most valued 'treasures'. The nineteenth-century cult of Marie Antoinette was perhaps initiated by the Empress, as she began amassing and displaying the Queen's furniture (much of which was still held in the French Royal Collection) and commissioning new copies of her favourite pieces.⁴⁹

There were other notable European aristocratic or royal collectors who showed a preference for the French eighteenth-century style. For example the famous and extremely wealthy collector and public figure Count Anatole Nikolaievich Demidov, 1st Prince of San Donato (1813-1870), who was married to Joseph Bonaparte's daughter, Princess Mathilde. Demidov could be flamboyant and determined in his collecting of eighteenth-century French paintings for which he had such a passion. His collection was sold in several public sales in Paris in 1863 and 1870. These were highly publicised and popular sales at which members of the Rothschild family, or at least their agents, are likely to have been present. Finally King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886), upon witnessing the '*Ancien*

⁴⁸ McCorquodale, *A History of Interior Decoration*, p. 167.

⁴⁹ Eugénie de Montijo was the empress consort of Emperor Napoleon III of France (1826-1920). After her husband was overthrown in 1870, following the Franco-Prussian War, Napoleon and Eugénie lived in exile in the United Kingdom. This preoccupation with the items once belonging to Marie Antoinette developed enthusiastic followers: it had perhaps begun at the Exposition Universelle of 1867, when the Empress Eugénie had helped to arrange an exhibition of Marie Antoinette's possessions.

Régime revival style' on a visit to Versailles and Paris in 1867, consciously adopted the 'Bourbon' styles for the decoration of three of his castles Neuschwanstein, Herrenschiemsee and Linderhof. The decorative style he employed exhibited fantasy and exuberance and according to McCorquodale showed 'devotion to the Rococo at its most excessive and bizarre'.⁵⁰

Nouveau-riche collectors

Closely linked with the British collectors already mentioned were collectors who did not have an aristocratic background, but that were interested in acquiring the same objects and decorating their residences in the same styles as upper-class individuals of the early-nineteenth century. These individuals generally began to show an interest in collecting from the 1830s and 40s onwards. They included Sir Julius Charles Wernher, 1st Baronet (1850 -1912), Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet (1788-1850), Ralph Bernal (1783-1854), Hollingworth Magniac (1786–1867), Robert Stayner Holford (1808-1892), John Bowes (1811-1885) and members of the Barings family. Such individuals, and especially the example of the Barings family, illustrate that other *nouveau-riche* men of this period were interested in acquiring the same sort of objects as the English Rothschilds, and making similar stylistic statements at their residences. Both Holford and the Barings were acquainted with the English Rothschilds, were rivals in the salerooms and employed the same dealers.

Sir Robert Peel was the son of the industrialist and MP Sir Robert Peel, 1st Baronet (1750-1830). Robert Peel junior was a politician himself, serving as Prime Minister 1834-1835 and again 1841-1846. His collection of works of art was one of the finest amongst the new industrial or commercial rich and he was appointed as Trustee of the National Gallery in the late 1820s. Peel's primary interest lay with the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century, though he was also interested in the Flemish painters: 78 of the 128 paintings he amassed were by Dutch masters making it one of the greatest Old Master collections of the century. Such a preference for Old Master works, often considered an interest reserved for the aristocracy, was shown by certain members of the English Rothschild family also, for example Lionel and Alfred. Peel also amassed a fine body of work by

⁵⁰ McCorquodale, *A History of Interior Decoration*, p. 175.

English school artists as the Rothschilds did, perhaps admiring not only their beauty but their historical associations.

Ralph Bernal was the highly successful politician son of a prosperous West India merchant who had been a member of the London Portuguese Jewish community. Bernal's father quarrelled with the elders of the Synagogue and he was therefore baptized in the Church of England. Bernal spent a great deal of money building up a very large collection of Sèvres, majolica and Renaissance silver which was sold at Christie's in 1855. This was a famous sale which encouraged others to admire his collection and adopt a similar collecting taste. Such a sale may have caught the attention of the English Rothschild family and furthermore reveals they were not unique at this time in building collections of precious Renaissance objects and French porcelain.

The English mine and racehorse owner John Bowes amassed an extensive and diverse collection during his lifetime which included Old Master paintings, Sèvres porcelain, glass and silverware, tapestries, ceramics and clocks. His collection was highly comparable to that of the English Rothschild family, revealing a further instance of an Englishman with very continental tastes. This may have been because Bowes spent most of his life abroad in France (allegedly because he was ostracised from British society on account of being illegitimate) with his French wife amassing this collection of fine and decorative arts. This European background is why the English Rothschild family's collections were so closely matched to his. Upon his death Bowes left a good part of his estate to be used for the construction of a custom-built home for his collection in North Yorkshire. This grand museum opened in 1892, a product of Bowes's passion for collecting. It is notable that, as certain members of the Rothschild family did, Bowes chose a French Renaissance château-style building to house his very European collection: perhaps hinting at his European background, and exhibiting his plutocratic wealth and continental tastes.



Figure 59: Bowes Museum

The collecting tastes of Sir Julius Charles Wernher were very similar to those of the Rothschild family. Werner had been born in Hesse, the son of a railway engineer. He moved to London at the age of 21 and focussed his significant business acumen on the diamond trade within the firm of Wernher, Beit & Co. where he amassed a significant fortune. He was created a baronet in 1905 and at the time of his death his fortune was estimated at £12 million. Werher's wealth allowed him to build up a significant collection of works of art, which he kept at his London residence at Bath House, Piccadilly, and at his country mansion Luton Hoo, Hertfordshire. Wernher's collection was highly comparable to those of the English Rothschild family, perhaps on account of their shared continental European background. It included Old Master paintings, sculpture, porcelain as well as a substantial amount of Medieval and Renaissance items (mostly jewellery).



Figure 60: Bath House, Piccadilly (English Heritage, NMRC)

The prolific Barings banking family were significant commercial rivals to the Rothschild family. They sustained an interest in Old Master painting throughout several generations, in a similar way to the English Rothschild family. Sir Francis, 1st Baronet Baring (1740-1810), who has been called the 'founder of the family fortunes', was the first of his family to begin accumulating objects with which to furnish his residences: his interest focussed on Dutch Old Master works.⁵¹ He encouraged other family members in this taste and they followed suit. Sir Francis's sons, Thomas, 2nd Baronet Baring (1772-1848) and Alexander Baring, 1st Baron Ashburton (1774-1848) developed their own collections. Sir Thomas acquired many more Dutch pictures in the early nineteenth century, adding to those he had inherited from his father. In 1814 however he sold these works *en bloc* to the Prince Regent, acting as somewhat of a dealer. It was reported visitors found his country house, Stratton Park in Hampshire, rather like a museum.⁵² Alexander built up a notable collection of mainly Dutch and Flemish Old Master works and reportedly spent more money on his paintings collection than any other man in England.⁵³ Sir Thomas's son, also Thomas (1799-1873) was perhaps the most innovative and successful member of the family in his collecting efforts. He possessed an enormous fortune and devoted much of it to developing his collections: he bought in almost every field, adding Dutch, Italian, French and Spanish works to the collection he had inherited from his father. He was a particularly enthusiastic collector of Watteau from the 1850s. As the Rothschilds did, the Baring family also favoured French Rococo interiors and decorative objects. The two families shared the same dealers, must have known one another, and importantly known of each other's collecting activities.

The Barings family owned also a number of significant properties in England, residences where they lived in comparable style to the Rothschild family. Several town and country houses were rebuilt, remodelled, expanded and furnished by them. Sometimes the country houses lay on modest country estates, which became the seats of Baronetcies. The country properties of individual family members were notably grouped together in the same areas, in a very similar way to the Rothschild family.

⁵¹ Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*.

⁵² G.F. Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (London: John Murray, 1838), III, pp. 27-46.

⁵³ G.F. Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (London: John Murray, 1838), II, pp. 265-86; *The Art Union Exhibition* (London, 1847), pp. 122-7; Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art*.

To these *nouveau-riche* collectors must be added the self-made millionaire James Morrison (1789-1857) who had risen from the position of assistant in a London haberdasher to become a highly successful businessman with an immense fortune. Dakers writes that the wealth of the Morrison family was 'legendary in their lifetimes; their land, their country houses and their collections of art were the subject of notice, sometimes envy'.⁵⁴ At his properties of Fonthill Pavillion, Wiltshire and Basildon Park, Berkshire, as well as his town house in Harley Street, London, James Morrison displayed his collections of art. Dakers writes that these residences were his 'palaces of art, filled with the physical evidence of his wealth and good taste'.⁵⁵ In particular Morrison intended Basildon Park to be a 'casket to enclose his pictorial gems'.⁵⁶ Dakers has described Morrison's taste as 'aristocratic and cosmopolitan', a taste he shared with other collectors such as the English Rothschild family, the Marquesses of Hertford, George IV, and the Barings.⁵⁷ The paintings, furniture and decorative art objects which he collected, as well as the type of decoration he employed in his residences were highly comparable to those collectors and exhibited much luxury and decoration. Morrison had taken a Grand Tour of Italy in the mid 1820s and here he had viewed multiple important European collections; his own taste was certainly influenced by his experiences. On this trip he had been entertained by the Italian Rothschild family in Naples, and by Count Demidoff in Venice and Florence. In addition Morrison's friendship with several Royal Academicians coloured his tastes and encouraged his acquisition of Old Master paintings (Dutch genre paintings in particular).

Like the English Rothschild family Morrison also turned his attention to collecting decorative works of art and furniture. In this Dakers points to objects such as 'tables of Florentine marble, Italian tortoiseshell, ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory, and Egyptian porphyry; lacquer bureau-cabinets and bouffe furniture; Etruscan vases and classical statues' which were on display in his residences. Gustav Waagen viewed Morrison's London residence in 1854 and declared that it contained 'the specimens of costly plate, vases, objects in ivory...Raphael-ware, and other tasteful objects, all quite in keeping with the other works of art in this fine collection'.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Dakers, *A Genius for Money*, p. 40.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁶ Wyatt Papworth, *John B. Papworth, Architect to the King of Wurtemberg: a brief record of his life and works* (London, 1879).

⁵⁷ Dakers, *A Genius for Money*, p. 105.

⁵⁸ Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, II, p. 23

Conclusion

The examples cited in this chapter reveal that there were other collectors in the nineteenth century who were collecting the same sorts of objects, and creating the same style of interiors that the English Rothschilds were for their residences in the Vale of Aylesbury. The family therefore were not creating unique interiors or collecting objects which were not already being collected. It is also clear that the English Rothschild family were not solely following either those tastes established by the old aristocracy or strictly only those adopted by other *nouveau-riche* collectors. Instead the tastes of the English Rothschilds were cosmopolitan and European, in the manner of figures like Beckford, Hamilton and George IV. The highly decorative, opulent and continental style was attractive to both old money and to new money, and particularly the English Rothschilds. Why exactly the family found it so appealing will be explored in the following chapter.

If the Rothschild family were not unique or *avant-garde* in the kind of objects they collected and the interior styles they chose, why their collecting activities and modes of presentation have been seen as distinctive (giving rise to the phrase *le goût Rothschild*) must be questioned. This will also be examined in the next chapter, and will lead to a discussion regarding how exactly the family members chose to present themselves through the presentation of their properties in the Vale of Aylesbury. Such an examination will enable a further understanding of the function of the English Rothschilds' country residences in the Vale of Aylesbury.

Chapter Seven

The English Rothschild Family and *le goût Rothschild*

This thesis has identified that in the nineteenth century the interiors of the mansions of the English Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury exhibited on the whole a shared taste, with many styles and objects appearing in each. It has also been noted however that Rothschild family members were not the only *nouveau-riche* individuals choosing to present their houses in the styles they chose, or to collect the type of objects they did. This being the case, why the phrases *le goût Rothschild* or *le style Rothschild* (with their implied sense of uniqueness) came into existence should be questioned. This will facilitate a discussion about how exactly the English Rothschilds employed their country properties in the nineteenth century.

The use of the term *le goût Rothschild* in Britain seems to have begun only in the early-twentieth century: Mrs Steuart Erskin, writing in the *Connoisseur* of 1902, was probably one of the first to employ it.¹ As well as using the phrase she also noted that the Rothschilds were 'a family which is conspicuous for the love of art'.² That the phrase was coined (and remains) in French is notable: when the expression was first employed in Britain it was used to describe what was perceived as an imported taste, one which was European and had little or no basis in English styles. By the time the phrase came to be commonly used in Britain from the mid-twentieth century onwards (by authors such as Francis Watson and Serge Fortis-Rolle in *Apollo* for example) it clearly encompassed a whole style and manner of decoration, one which placed emphasis on Dutch Old Master paintings, French *boiseries* and gaudy magnificence, employed primarily in the pursuit of status and power.³ Such a definition is now often used indiscriminately to describe all Rothschild houses of the Vale of Aylesbury when in fact, as has been shown in this thesis, the styles and objects displayed in the properties were more eclectic, and the collecting activities of the family were less systematic, more personal and often undertaken largely for pleasure. The later adoption and development of elements of the Rothschilds' manner of presentation by American plutocrats has also clouded the view of what exactly the Rothschild style was, as indeed has anti-Semitism and certain negative opinions

¹ Mrs Steuart Erskin, 'Notable Collections: the collection of Alfred de Rothschild in Seamore Place', *The Connoisseur*, III (1902), 71-76.

² Ibid.

³ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 371.

expressed by the aristocracy in Britain in the nineteenth century. The phrase *le goût Rothschild* was never applied by contemporaries to describe the residences of the English Rothschild family in the nineteenth century.

Even if they did not use the phrase it does appear however that the Rothschilds' manner of presentation of their residences and their collecting activities in the nineteenth century were considered by contemporaries as noteworthy. Niall Ferguson notes that the first descriptions of Rothschild interiors began to appear in the 1830s.⁴ They include comments made by Count Rudolf Apponyi and Heinrich Heine regarding the Paris *hôtel* of James de Rothschild (1792-1868) in the rue Lafitte for example. Apponyi's description in particular noted there was a sense of luxury and of uniformity in the presentation:

The carpets, the candelabras, the chandeliers, the material for the draperies with heavy tassels of gold and silver – in short, everything is in the same style; there are clocks inlaid and enamelled on azure bases, solid gold vases encrusted with precious stones and fine pearls. In a word, it is a luxury which surpasses all imagination.⁵

Certainly, then, this particular Rothschild interior was thought to be luxurious, and contained everything that was of the 'same style'. In the 1880s the American author Henry James described the houses of the English Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury as 'Rothschildish' when he stayed as a guest at several of them.⁶ This again reveals an opinion that all the interiors appeared very similar but discernibly different to their contemporaries in some way: this chapter will explore why exactly they may have been considered as such.

The English Rothschild family: a distinctive style

Certainly many of the interiors of the Rothschild mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury in the nineteenth century had common elements. Overall the interior ensembles were highly decorative; the furnishings were generally luxurious, and *boiseries* and antique tapestries

⁴ Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild: The World's Banker 1849-1999* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 347.

⁵ Count Rudolf Apponyi, *Vingt-cinq ans à Paris, 1825-50*, 4 vols, (Paris 1914), III, p. 471.

⁶ Henry James, *Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel, 4 vols (London, 1981), III, p. 89.

were sometimes present. Furthermore the decorative arts which were most plentiful were those of the French eighteenth-century. Yet it has been shown that the English Rothschild family members were not unique in this period in the kind of objects they collected, or in the choice of French eighteenth-century and Italian Renaissance decorative styles for their mansions.⁷ Instead there were other elements which ran through all of the interiors of the houses in the Vale of Aylesbury in the nineteenth century which were more responsible for the sense of uniformity and uniqueness which the Rothschild style displayed.

Generational style and a network of collectors

The Rothschild style of the nineteenth century appeared distinctive because many aspects of family members' tastes were shared across generations and between countries. Every generation and branch of the Rothschild family displayed a deep-rooted and consistent interest in collecting, in almost every field: it was this hereditary instinct and tradition of collecting which helped to set them apart from other *nouveau-riche* families. Frank Herman has called the Rothschild family a 'unique dynasty in the annals of European collecting' and Joseph Alsop proclaims the Rothschilds as 'the only modern collecting dynasty to persist on a grand scale for five generations.'⁸ Indeed the Rothschilds were some of the greatest collectors of the nineteenth century and tastes were shared and continued both across generations and across nations.

As noted in Chapter Five a collector's upbringing and exposure to art as well as any inherited familial tastes frequently influence the nature of their collecting activities and preferences in objects. The English Rothschilds and their European relatives had begun collecting continental Renaissance and French objects and expressing a preference towards French interiors styles for their increasingly lavish residences from the 1830s onwards. These general preferences extended to specific objects: an interest in eighteenth-century Sèvres porcelain for example (both freestanding objects and inlaid to

⁷ The collections of Lord Hertford and Sir Richard Wallace for example (as seen today at Hertford House, London, the Wallace Collection) are highly comparable to those of the Rothschild family: they were undoubtedly acquainted and Alfred de Rothschild in particular knew Sir Richard Wallace well.

⁸ *The English as Collectors: a documentary chrestomathy*, ed. by Hermann, p. 361; Joseph Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions: the history of art collecting and its linked phenomena wherever these have appeared* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 138.

furniture) had been shown by the Rothschild family since the 1830s.⁹ In addition a taste for Renaissance *Schatzkammer* objects was a long-held Rothschild family tradition and Mayer's interest in such items is reflected in the provision of specific display areas for such objects in the design of the mansion.

For example Lionel de Rothschild's sons Nathaniel and Alfred de Rothschild inherited a great volume of objects from their father and continued many of his collecting tastes (the acquisition of English eighteenth-century portraits for instance). Generally their tastes in *objects d'art* and furniture were highly comparable to those of their uncles at Mentmore House and Aston Clinton House. They grew up living amongst the collections of Renaissance and eighteenth-century continental objects at Piccadilly, Gunnersbury Park, and whilst visiting their uncles in the Vale of Aylesbury. They had even bought objects for their father's collection.

Nathaniel inherited many objects from his father which he chose to install at his country residence of Tring Park. Indeed certain rooms of the house were designed around objects which Nathaniel had inherited or already possessed: for instance the Morning Room and its continental *Schatzkammer* collection and the Dining Room and its English portraits. In addition the objects acquired by Nathaniel himself for his mansion remained on the whole within the general canon of tastes laid down by his father and uncles (and wider Rothschild family). Correspondence reveals Nathaniel had formed opinions and preferences in the area of collecting during early adulthood: in the early 1860s whilst studying at Cambridge he wrote to his parents that he thought 'a fine majolica bowl at Gunnersbury better than anything at Kensington Boilers' (the Kensington Museum and School of Art).¹⁰ Whilst also at Cambridge he wrote to his parents that he 'would like to buy the Clare Hall plate'.¹¹ Alfred similarly inherited a good deal of the art objects displayed at Halton House from his father. Alfred esteemed his father's collections (of paintings in particular) and praised his collecting efforts: when he inherited his share he went so far as to have a two-volume

⁹ Lionel de Rothschild for example had offered his mother Hannah 'some old inlaid Furniture...made in the time of Louis 14th...or some old sevre (sic) China' in 1831: RAL, XI/109/20/1/42, Lionel de Rothschild to Hannah Rothschild, 27 April 1831.

¹⁰ RAL, RFam C/3/76, Nathaniel de Rothschild to Lionel and Charlotte de Rothschild, no date, c.1860s; The Kensington Museum and School of Art was popularly called the 'Kensington Boilers' on account of the peculiar form of the temporary buildings, and the fact they were mainly composed of, and covered with sheet iron.

¹¹ RAL, RFam C/3/122, Nathaniel de Rothschild to Lionel and Charlotte de Rothschild, no date, c.1860s.

catalogue compiled.¹² His introduction to this work, published in 1884, reveals his feelings on the collection he now possessed:

The principal objects, and those which, needless to say, I most prize, I inherited from my dearly beloved father, and, in addition to the great pleasure which they afforded me, they constantly remind me of his most perfect judgement and taste.¹³

The displays of *Schatzkammer* objects at Halton House once again owed to an inherited taste. As Alfred expanded his collections over the course of his life from the base of objects he inherited his tastes remained largely in line with those of his father. Leopold at Ascott showed a similar reverence for the items he inherited from his father and also commissioned a commemorative catalogue of the silver he had inherited.¹⁴ Finally further evidence of the continuance of inherited tastes with the Rothschild family can be seen in Ferdinand's childhood home at Grüneburg, just outside Frankfurt, which was a clear precedent for the interior decoration and style found at Waddesdon Manor.

This dynastic sharing of tastes and collections was a somewhat aristocratic mode of behavior, and probably set the family apart from other *nouveau-riche* families of the period: through this activity the English Rothschilds were able to begin to display and emphasize their lineage and inheritance. Indeed the majority of other *nouveau-riche* families of this period appear unable or little interested to establish multigenerational dynasties, or continue a tradition of collecting through several generations.

The extent of these shared tastes is also notable when it is considered that the English family members often coveted similar items. Furthermore they were keen to share information, but to keep market intelligence within the family: for example, when Lionel (on a trip abroad) learnt that the estate of Lord Bute at Luton was to be sold he wrote to his brother Anthony de Rothschild and instructed him to find out if the painting collections would be offered, but added 'keep it to yourself and do not talk much about it...take care that no person goes there before you'.¹⁵ Often English family members would come

¹² Charles Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, 2 vols (London, 1884), this featured 112 works in all.

¹³ Ibid., preface.

¹⁴ RAL, 000/375, E. Alfred Jones, *Catalogue of the Collection of Old Plate of Leopold de Rothschild Esq* (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1890).

¹⁵ RAL, XI/109/49/1/15, Lionel de Rothschild, Paris, to brothers, 3 Oct 1844.

together to make purchases *en bloc*, revealing their unity, willingness and ability to collaborate. The sale of the collection of Cardinal Fesch in 1839 for example interested Lionel and his four brothers greatly: they conducted a long debate in their letters of the early 1840s about the best price to pay for the collection and how to divide it up between them.¹⁶

The brothers were evidently aware of how strongly their tastes overlapped: Nathaniel for example wrote to his brother Mayer when a dealer who acted for Mayer happened to be in Paris: 'if you want things you should write to yr humble servant as well as to him because it might happen that unconsciously I might spoil yr market'.¹⁷ Sometimes family members would purchase works of art for one another: Lionel for example bought some gold dishes and a unicorn for Nathaniel at the sale of the Duke of Sussex's estate in 1843 and at a sale in Paris in 1849 Lionel asked Anthony to buy 'anything good in silver or any good crystal cups...in fact anything you think really first rate'.¹⁸ It is of note that excess *boiseries* originally purchased by Mayer for Mentmore House were later resold and installed at Waddesdon Manor. Also at Halton House and Waddesdon Manor were two matching eighteenth-century corner cabinets by René Dubois, possibly bought as a pair by Alfred and Ferdinand and split between their two mansions.¹⁹ Finally at Mentmore House in the Green Drawing Room was a large marble chimneypiece, the companion of which was installed at Waddesdon Manor. As has been noted the English Rothschild family members also tended to turn to the same dealers and agents in their collecting activities. This no doubt further encouraged a shared taste.

Few other British collectors had such a network of family and friends abroad as the English Rothschilds: the wider Rothschild family was truly continental. Michael Hall considers that the family were the '*avant-garde*' of an increasingly international art market, unique as collectors because of their network of communications and sources of information.²⁰

Tastes were shared between Rothschild collectors of different countries, and collections were formed upon similar models. An example related by Ferdinand shows his father

¹⁶ RAL, XI/109/45B/6/113, Nathaniel de Rothschild, Paris, to his brothers, undated (1843); RAL, XI/109/47/1/123, Nathaniel de Rothschild to brothers, undated (1844); RAL, XI/104/1/5/121, Nathaniel de Rothschild, Paris, to Lionel and Mayer de Rothschild, 2 September 1841; in the end these discussions came to nothing as they could not agree on a suitable price.

¹⁷ RAL, XI/109/75/2, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, 30 May 1850.

¹⁸ RAL 000/13/53, Lionel de Rothschild to Charlotte de Rothschild, 4 February 1859; RAL, XI/109/72/1, Lionel de Rothschild, Wildbad, to Anthony de Rothschild, Paris, 31 July 1849.

¹⁹ Conversation with Ulrich Leben, Associate Curator of Furniture, Waddesdon Manor, May 2010.

²⁰ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 366.

Anselm von Rothschild (1808-1874) and his uncle Carl von Rothschild (1788-1855) shared similar tastes:

Once a pair of beautifully chiseled cups dated 1568 were offered to my father...For some reason I have never ascertained my Father would only buy one of the cups and persuaded his uncle to take the other. The uncle bequeathed the whole of his plate to my uncle Lionel, and his cup went eventually to my cousin Alfred, while my father's came in to my hands.²¹

It appears that Ferdinand also modelled his New Smoking Room, which he intended as a showcase for his *Schatzkammer* objects, on the examples of his French cousins, Alphonse (1827-1905) and Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1934) who had created similar rooms in their Parisian *hôtels* in the 1870s.²²

Continental influences and travel

The English Rothschild family's early experiences of continental travel were formative in their collecting activities. Family members benefitted from frequent and early experiences of travel, both for pleasure and for education: they had all travelled outside of England, many for prolonged periods. Whilst on these trips to continental Europe they visited foreign collections of works of art, and viewed those of their continental relatives. In adulthood they continued this tendency to travel to various parts of Europe and maintained close alliances with Rothschild kin across the continent.

Anthony for example had studied at Universities in Göttingen and Strasbourg and had undertaken an extended trip in the mid-1820s around continental Europe with his brother Lionel during which they viewed various art collections. He continued to travel in continental Europe throughout his life. Mayer's correspondence in the 1830s and 1860s reveals he was frequently abroad and interested in foreign collections; Nathaniel similarly travelled extensively in continental Europe in early adulthood: in the 1860s he corresponded with his parents from Paris, Frankfurt, Versailles and Florence.²³ Certain of

²¹ Dora Thornton, 'From Waddesdon to the British Museum: Baron Ferdinand Rothschild and his cabinet collection', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 13:2 (2001), 191-213.

²² Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstammer* of the nineteenth century', 57-67.

²³ RAL, RFam C/3/various, c.1860s.

his letters attest to his interest in collecting precious continental objects and decorative schemes: in 1862 he reported to his mother Charlotte from Chamarande, France that he had 'seen a pretty little Louis XIV room for £800'.²⁴ Finally Leopold and his cousin Ferdinand travelled to Europe together in the late 1860s and purchased many art objects, communicating often with Lionel in their letters.

The English Rothschild family members were undoubtedly international in their outlook and due to their continental contacts their tastes in collecting were frequently influenced by European patterns and attitudes. This was not always the case for other English collectors: no other English family so active in collecting had such an international background and character. They were able to acquire items through a network of continental links outside of the normal bounds of London-based dealers and auction houses.²⁵ With the ability to travel to the Continent frequently and access foreign art markets or dealers, a knowledge of at least three European languages and almost limitless continental contacts, each Rothschild collector was able to exploit their position in the pursuit of their collections, placing them ahead of most others.

Shared tastes: the wider Rothschild family

The Rothschild family's reach and size also helped to drive the popular notion of *le goût Rothschild*: the pan-European family became famous for its collecting and perceived style not only because family members created such lavish interiors, with such a quantity and quality of objects, but also because every branch in Europe did so, and highly visibly. As Ferdinand summarised in his *Reminiscences*:

It is the apparent ubiquitousness of my family, with its members residing in Vienna, Frankfort, Paris, Naples and London, and all of them lovers of and purchasers of old art that accounts, to a great extent, for our name being so prominently identified with the mania.²⁶

Certain tastes in collecting and interior decoration were shared between many members of the Rothschild family all over Europe, notably an admiration for the interior style, furniture

²⁴ RAL, RFam C/3/27, Nathaniel de Rothschild to Charlotte de Rothschild, 22 December 1862.

²⁵ Hall, 'The English Rothschilds as Collectors', 265-285.

²⁶ Waddesdon Manor Archives, 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

and art objects of the eighteenth century in France, but also an interest in items of precious metal, mostly of Renaissance date. Often the tastes of different European branches of the family were so similar that individual members shared ideas and purchased items for one another. In the mid-1840s for example Mayer Carl von Rothschild (1820-1886) asked Lionel, his cousin, to buy 'anything pretty' coming up in a sale of 'silver things' in London and Anselm von Rothschild asked to be sent a catalogue of the same sale.²⁷ When in 1862 many members of the English and French branches of the family lent objects to the International Exhibition at South Kensington the similarity in the tastes of the two branches was clear.²⁸

With such similar tastes the family members often found themselves in close competition with each other for choice objects. Sometimes they might even employ others to bid on their behalf to avoid alerting their relatives of their interest in certain pieces. Competition between various branches of the family could be fierce and not always amiable. In 1884 Ferdinand wrote to the 5th Earl of Rosebery (Mayer's son-in-law):

my dearly beloved relations continue purchasing artistic wonders. Oddly though they never admire each other's purchases - and while extolling their own discrimination, ridicule the follies committed by others.²⁹

In a letter to Lionel from a trip to Paris sometime in the 1860s Ferdinand revealed quite how interested in each other's collecting activities the wider family could be. During a visit to his Parisian relatives he reported 'the whole family told me I only came to buy the pictures, and seems very anxious to know what Adolphe, and myself think of doing at the sale. They also believe that you have given some orders.'³⁰ Ferdinand directly competed with his French cousins for many items: he admired them and wanted to emulate their collections and interior decorative schemes and they became his closest rivals. These included certain *boiseries* he desired when Waddesdon Manor was being furnished. He wrote to Lionel in December 1874:

²⁷ RAL, XI/109/56/1/79, Mayer Carl von Rothschild, Frankfurt, to Lionel de Rothschild, 14 April 1846; RAL, XI/109/56/1/125, Anselm von Rothschild, Frankfurt, to his cousins, 22 April 1846.

²⁸ Individuals included Lionel, Mayer, his wife Juliana de Rothschild and their French relatives James, Alphonse and Gustav de Rothschild.

²⁹ Dora Thornton, 'From Waddesdon to the British Museum: Baron Ferdinand Rothschild and his cabinet collection', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 13:2, (2001), 191-213; Ferdinand de Rothschild to the 5th Earl of Rosebery, April 1884: quoted in Mark Girouard, 'Insatiable and discerning, curiosity hunting under the Rothschilds', *Apollo*, 386 (April 1994), 14-18.

³⁰ RAL, 000/26, Ferdinand de Rothschild, Paris, to Lionel de Rothschild, 15 April (no date).

but there are plenty of pretty decorative articles about if one chooses to pay for them. I saw a very pretty Louis XVI mantelpiece for which I offered five thousand francs and which Gustav bought five minutes afterwards for twelve.³¹

In his *Reminiscences* Ferdinand recalled a similar incident:

In my youthful days I had been offered a Louis XVI mantelpiece by Mr Phillip...and which my cousin Adolphe soon afterwards purchased of M Spitzer for double the amount Philips had asked of me.³²

The Parisian James de Rothschild could be a formidable opponent, and was often relentless in his pursuit of the best items on the European market, even when in competition with his own family. Ferdinand described a particularly underhand purchase by his uncle of certain leather hangings in the 1850s:

My parents were informed that Count Schonborn of Pommersfeld intended selling his art...My Mother made an excursion to Pommersfeld...she returned full of ecstasy over some sixteenth century stamped leather hangings, the like of which she declared she had never seen before. She strongly urged my Father to allow her to acquire them, and by an unfortunate coincidence Baron James coming to Frankfort at this time, my Mother, in the innocence of her heart, spoke to him of the leather in terms of glowing admiration. Baron James never moved a muscle and maintained the most discreet silence, but on the following day he posted off to Wurzburg and bought the leather for his Chateau of Ferrières, of which it is now the chief ornament.³³

The competition was reciprocated by many of James's family members: Ferdinand's father Anselm for example congratulated himself on the acquisition of a boxwood figure of a patrician lady, signed by Albrecht Dürer, whilst in his company. In his *Reminiscences* Ferdinand related that his father valued the item not only for its monetary worth and

³¹ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 100.

³² Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

³³ Ibid.

beauty, but also because he had managed to purchase the item without James doing so first:

while accompanying his Uncle James on a round of shopping in Vienna my Father saw this figure...He could hardly master his emotion and was fearfully apprehensive lest it might be noted by his worthy relative, but fortunately it escaped the keen eye of Baron James. As soon as his uncle was disposed of my father rushed back to Mr Ampichel, and bought the figure.³⁴

In addition when Lionel purchased some works from Lord Coventry's collection in 1843 his brother Nathaniel commented that the purchases would make their uncle James 'quite jealous'.³⁵ Also upon visiting the 'Palace of the Princess Galitzin', who was considering the sale of her collections, Leopold de Rothschild reported to his father that Ferdinand suggested it would have been 'a great joke to take the best things away from Uncle James'.³⁶

Quantity of objects

The foreign (and often French historical) character of the interiors the Rothschild family favoured for their country mansions in this period was notable. Yet the family members were not the only individuals employing such modes of display and collecting. What set the Rothschild family apart from others who chose to employ such styles was their ability to spend so much time and money on amassing great numbers of lavish items.³⁷ Through this the Rothschild family showed their plutocratic rather than aristocratic position as collectors in this period. The family had an exceptionally strong financial situation which meant that nothing lay outside their grasp: the art market was flooded with large amounts of good quality works and they had the financial powers to buy in whatever field they wished. The funds that they had available for building mansions and for buying art objects were substantially greater than even the wealthiest of their contemporaries, and indeed a

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ RAL, XI/109/45B/6/131, Nathaniel de Rothschild, Paris, to his brothers, undated (1843).

³⁶ RAL, 000/924/5, Leopold de Rothschild, St Petersburg, to Lionel de Rothschild, 15 September 1867.

³⁷ Other prominent examples of interiors designed in French historical styles include Hertford House, London, the residence of Richard Wallace; Wrest Park, Bedfordshire built for the 2nd Earl de Grey; and Farnborough Hill the residence of the Empress Eugénie during her exile in England.

great number of aristocratic collectors who were increasingly impoverished in this period.³⁸ An examination of the capital of the English Rothschild bank in this period compared to their closest rivals makes this fact clear: in 1875 N. M. Rothschild & Sons boasted a capital of £5.90 million whilst the figures of their closest rivals, J. S. Morgan, J. H. Schröder and the Baring Brothers, were considerably lower at £1.80 million, £1.69 million and £1.63 million respectively.³⁹

The Rothschild collections of art and furniture therefore were impressive by their 'size and splendour', and by a sense of the wealth which surrounded them.⁴⁰ Often works would be amassed for the specific purpose of incorporating them into an interior ensemble.⁴¹ Mayer at Mentmore House and Alfred at Halton House in particular seemed to have amassed an extraordinary volume of articles in such a way: at Mentmore for example there were a vast number of French miniatures in the White Drawing Room and Blarenberghe Room and at Halton Alfred owned six complete Sevres services.⁴²

Quality and lavishness

When writers today refer to *le goût Rothschild* they generally have in mind French-Rococo style interiors, displaying a combination of Old Master paintings, English eighteenth-century portraits, and French eighteenth-century furniture and porcelain.⁴³ But this is only part of the story. It has been shown that the interiors of the houses in the Vale of Aylesbury were eclectic and did not all conform to this model. Certainly there were rooms presented in the French eighteenth-century style and with copious amount of French eighteenth-century objects, but there were also French Renaissance objects, German Renaissance objects, treasury rooms and neoclassical or Italian-Renaissance style decorative schemes. Due to their extreme wealth the Rothschild family could afford to experiment with original and eclectic tastes, and be extravagant in any scheme they chose.

The idea that the Rothschild family universally and without exception used genuine eighteenth-century French *boiseries* in all their houses for example is misleading. John

³⁸ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 312.

³⁹ Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild*, p. 808, table 25a.

⁴⁰ *The English as Collectors*, ed. by Herman, p. 361.

⁴¹ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 78.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches'.

Harris suggests that by the 1870s the Rothschild family's name had become 'synonymous with a style of interior decoration which used "old materials"', and Bruno Pons also finds the Rothschilds' name 'became associated with the collecting of old *boiseries*'.⁴⁴ This of course may be true if continental examples are also included, yet it is often assumed that all family members employed antique panelling in their residences to a great extent. Harris believes that the English Rothschilds joined their 'continental relations in their enthusiasm' for French panelling.⁴⁵ Yet not all English Rothschild mansions employed these objects in their country houses and certainly not to the degree some definitions of the Rothschild style might imply. There were some rooms at Mentmore House and Aston Clinton House which contained such elements, but the majority of rooms at these properties did not. Surviving evidence suggests Tring Park House did not contain any such fittings. Of course Alfred employed imitation Rococo-style panelling extensively in the Saloon and first floor of Halton House and at Waddesdon Manor Ferdinand built up a large collection of such items. These last two examples (in particular Waddesdon as a high-profile National Trust property today) have perhaps encouraged the opinion that all residences contained these items. In addition there were many other examples of Rothschild family members employing French *boiseries* in their residences in the nineteenth century in continental Europe: in Paris Edmond (1845-1934) and Gustave de Rothschild (1829-1911) collected these objects for their *hotels* and the Austrian Albert (1844-1911) and Nathaniel de Rothschild (1836-1905) also made numerous purchases for their Viennese *hôtels*. It would seem probable that the use of French *boiseries* has become so closely linked with the Rothschild name as a result of these objects being installed in the residences of so many family members in so many different countries in the nineteenth century.

A Rothschild 'taste' certainly existed in the mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury, but as shown in this thesis it was not one confined to a certain narrowly defined aesthetic. Instead it is characterised by the excess, abundance and luxury of the objects, and the energy and money expended in creating the interior ensembles. This taste did not create new fashions, but encouraged various styles by displaying them on a grand scale and with great luxury. In their collecting activities the Rothschild family consistently sought the best pieces - those with the highest quality of workmanship. Family members were prepared to pay high prices for objects by named craftsmen, made for high-ranking historical figures or

⁴⁴ Harris, *Moving Rooms*, p. 66; Bruno Pons, *The James A de Rothschild Bequest at Waddesdon Manor: Architecture and Panelling*, (London: Philip Wilson Publishers for the Waddesdon Trust, 1996), p. 78.

⁴⁵ Harris, *Moving Rooms*, p. 66.

with proven provenance, and for authentic items. The younger generation of English Rothschilds in particular (Nathaniel, Alfred, Leopold and Ferdinand) had grown up surrounded by 'treasures' and so had come to appreciate fine craftsmanship and items of high quality. As Ferdinand noted, his family had sometimes been 'carried away in their anxiety to secure an article of superlative merit'.⁴⁶

Furthermore the objects collected and the interiors created were generally opulent and decorative, creating a particular kind of aesthetic. After visiting Halton House, for example, Sir Edward Hamilton noted that 'the decorations are sadly overdone and one's eye longs to rest on something which is not all gilt and gold'.⁴⁷ As has been noted previously the opulence, excess and lavishness which abounded in the Rothschild properties served a particular purpose, enabling them to project an image of themselves as a wealthy, successful and powerful dynasty.

The English Rothschild family: other influences on their tastes

The presentation of the interiors of all Rothschild mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury was influenced overwhelmingly by what was available and popular on the market at the time family members were building their collections. A great deal of the objects Anthony and Mayer collected for example had been acquired from recently dispersed French royal or aristocratic collections. High Renaissance and French eighteenth-century objects were acquired therefore because these were in abundance, popular, and could be purchased relatively inexpensively and easily. Alternative objects (for instance English Renaissance items), which may have matched the exterior style of Mentmore House and Aston Clinton House for example more closely, simply were not available on the market, and later alternative styles (the 'Queen Anne' for example) had not yet become popular. This was also the case for Nathaniel and Alfred,: the kinds of objects they collected (for example French eighteenth-century furniture and objects and German Renaissance 'curios') were readily available on the market of this period, were popular, and could create a certain luxurious aesthetic.

⁴⁶ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897.

⁴⁷ Rothschild, *The Baroness*, p. 62.

Social interactions

Very little correspondence has been uncovered which can reveal the opinions of English Rothschild family members on the subject of collecting or taste. It is impossible therefore to say with whom exactly they discussed their plans for their residences, or who influenced their collecting preferences. One source of information on this subject however might be the minute books of the Collectors Club (renamed the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1866), a society established for the object of

facilitating intercourse between men of Art predilections, and especially those who were Collectors, with a view of giving to them the opportunities of comparing their acquisitions, and of criticising and obtaining information in connexion [*sic*] with Art subjects.⁴⁸

Upon the society's formation in 1857 Lionel, Anthony and Mayer's names appeared on the list of Gentlemen 'willing to become members'. This list of potential subscribers numbered just over 100 and included titled men, those of lesser rank, museum figures and foreign ambassadors.⁴⁹ The society's founding rules stipulated that each member was compelled to show an object or objects at the meetings at least once every two years. The regular meetings (sometimes as frequently as once a week) were held at members' own residences and a variety of objects of 'Art and Vertue' were discussed.⁵⁰ A 'special branch of art' was selected for illustration at each meeting: the list of subjects was extensive and covered all major European art objects from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century.⁵¹

Records show that Mayer attended two meetings of the society: once in February 1858 at the London residence of the 3rd Earl Cadogan when porcelain was discussed, and once in

⁴⁸ NAL, London, MSL/1952/1325-1328, Fine Arts Club Minutes Book, 1874.

⁴⁹ Those who signed their names at this first meeting included for example the Marquess of Abercorn, the Marquess of Bredalbane, the Marquess of Landsdown, Lord de L'isle, Lord Overstone, Lord Broughton, the Duke of Hamilton, Henry Cole, J. C. Robinson, Sir Charles Eastlake, A. W. Franks, Robert Napier, Sir John Marjoribanks, H. Magniac, Louis Huth, George Tomline MP, and Alexander Barker.

⁵⁰ NAL, London, MSL/1952/1325-1328, Fine Arts Club Minutes Book, 1857.

⁵¹ Titles included for example Faience of Henri II, Faience de Bernard Palissy, Enamels of Limoges, English porcelain and earthenware, Illuminated manuscripts and other ancient illustrated books, Coins, medals and seals, Chinese and other oriental enamels, Medieval jewellery, Snuff boxes, Italian, French and German terra cotta, Ancient Venetian, Bohemian, Dutch and other glass wares, Dresden and all the minor German porcelain, Decorative clocks and watches, Majolica wares in general, Sculpture in marble, wood, ivory, wax etc, Arms and armour of every period and country, Oriental china, Art bronzes, Sèvres and all the minor French porcelains and faiences, Gold and Silversmiths' work.

July 1861 at the London residence of William Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, when 'Sèvres and all French porcelains and faïences, Faïences of Henry II, Faïence de Bernard Palissy, Enamels of Limoges, and Stamped pewter wares' were discussed. Anthony is recorded as having attended five of the regular meetings: once in May 1858 at Lionel's residence in Piccadilly, London; in June 1858 at the residence of the 5th Earl of Lanesborough, London; in July 1861 along with his brother Mayer; in June 1865 at the residence of Robert Stayner Holford, London; and in July 1866 at the London residence of the French Ambassador the Comte de Persigny.⁵² It is possible that the discussions which took place at these meetings, and the tastes of other members, may have influenced Mayer and Anthony's collecting activities: objects presented were overwhelmingly of continental manufacture or style from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. It is also likely that the family wished to allow others to view their own collections, and objects they prized the most, by participating in these meetings. Further evidence of such an interest in exhibiting their collections is shown if the loan of decorative art objects by Lionel and Mayer to the International Exhibition at South Kensington in 1862 is considered.⁵³

The third generation of English Rothschilds continued and expanded the social opportunities pursued by members of the previous generation. This ability to interact with upper-class individuals may have influenced their collecting preferences. Nathaniel, Alfred and Leopold become acquainted with many aristocratic men during their time at Cambridge (most notably Albert, Prince of Wales) and had the opportunity to visit the country residences of wealthy contemporaries (in the 1860s for example Nathaniel wrote to his parents from Stowe).⁵⁴ Such experiences may have encouraged their interest in continental decorative objects and interior schemes.

Dealers

The only other documentary sources which exist to help explain the collecting activities of the English Rothschild family are the receipts and notes they received from their dealers. In the case of Mentmore House the carefully devised furnishing and interior was

⁵² NAL, MSL/1952/1325-1328, Fine Arts Club Minutes Book, 1858, 1861, 1865, 1866.

⁵³ Individuals lending objects included Lionel, Mayer, his wife Juliana de Rothschild and their French relatives James, Alphonse and Gustav de Rothschild.

⁵⁴ RAL, RFam C/3/28, Nathaniel de Rothschild to Lionel and Charlotte de Rothschild, no date, c.1860s.

conducted by Mayer over several decades, in collaboration with a network of dealers and agents all over Europe: the repeated use of foreign styles and sources reflected not only Mayer's tastes but must also have been influenced by these dealers and agents. Unusually for a Rothschild family member, Mayer was dependent upon one dealer in particular: Alexander Barker (1797-1873). Barker lived at 103 Piccadilly, London, near to Mayer's town house (197 Piccadilly) and was a consistent figure in Mayer's life from 1850 to his death. Barker advised Mayer on a great deal of the decoration and furnishing of Mentmore House and supplied much of the furniture and *objets d'art*.⁵⁵ Mentmore's Dining Room especially was designed around salvaged eighteenth-century *boiseries* Barker had obtained from Paris, and the tapestries supplied by Barker for the Grand Hall informed the presentation of this room to a great degree. An early letter from Barker reveals much about his involvement in the furnishing and decorating of Mayer's mansion:

The fine collection of precious objects you have, have been obtained in consequence of the disasters of the ex-royal family of France and the misfortunes of others connected with them, and if not purchased at the time they presented themselves, could never have been obtained, and I am sure you will remember how often we have consulted as to how you would like each room decorated.⁵⁶

Barker often acquired large objects for Mayer and these were often highly influential in directing the decorative schemes of his mansion. He also supplied pictures, miniatures, Sèvres items and decorative clocks. Barker's own taste (as revealed in his personal collections) focused on Italian paintings, French furniture, continental ceramics and porcelain, Venetian and German glass, bronzes and carvings in wood, ivory and crystal. It was just these sorts of objects that he supplied Mayer for Mentmore.

The firms of Edward and David Falcke and the Durlacher Brothers (both of New Bond Street, London), John Webb, Samuel Pratt, and the firm of Nixon and Rhodes also feature frequently in Anthony and Mayer's receipts. These dealers and the objects they offered the brothers may well have driven their tastes towards French decorative *objets d'art* and furniture (both authentic and imitation). They supplied objects of silver, amber, ivory and

⁵⁵ Prevost-Marcilhacy, *Les Rothschilds*, p. 111.

⁵⁶ Dalmeny House Archive, Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild, in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883). The 'precious objects' Barker refers to in this letter were likely to have been ceramics, enamels, miniatures and other small objects.

amber; clocks; Limoges enamels; and miniatures. The Durlacher Brothers firm had been established by Henry and George Durlacher in 1843 and dealt principally in porcelain and majolica, eventually adding furniture, tapestries, decorative objects, and paintings to its trade. The firm counted among its clients Sir Richard Wallace, J. Pierpont Morgan, and the South Kensington Museum. Mayer also employed the French firm of Beurdeley, one of the most successful dynasties of furniture makers of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ The firm created furniture inspired by the Louis XVI period and was much admired for these nineteenth-century interpretations of eighteenth-century designs, creating works for many European Royal families (including Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie).

Alfred however rarely recorded his purchases in detail, and very few receipts relating to the purchase of items for his collections exist. It is evident that he rarely bought from auction, and disliked dealers; instead he acquired new works for his collections in other ways, both piecemeal through small private sales (for example he visited Charlecote in 1882 and purchased three paintings) or larger *en bloc* purchases (such as the 27 paintings from the Ashburton collection in 1907; or the 17 works from the executors of the estate of the 4th Earl of Lonsdale in 1885).⁵⁸ Thus Alfred's collections were composed of what was readily available on the market of the time, much of which was inevitably in the aristocratic tradition of collecting.

There were of course exceptions to Alfred's general dislike of dealers, and certain such individuals must have influenced his collecting tastes. The dealer Charles Davis was closely involved with the development of Alfred's collection, advising him on purchases and compiling a catalogue of his collection in 1884.⁵⁹ In addition Samson Wertheimer acted as an agent for Alfred, Leopold and Ferdinand. Wertheimer and his two sons, Asher and Charles, bought extensively for the Rothschild family at auction sales (in some cases acting for many different family members at the same sale).⁶⁰ In fact Wertheimer's relationship with the family was so close that Alfred and his brother Leopold de Rothschild acted as the executors of his will in 1892 and Ferdinand was made a godfather to one of

⁵⁷ The business was begun in 1804 by Jean Beurdeley (1772-1853) and slowly grew in reputation. His son, Louis-Auguste-Alfred Beurdeley (1808-1882) became still more famous and his works much sought after.

⁵⁸ RAL 000/174B/15, Alfred de Rothschild receipted accounts: Trustees of the will of the late Earl of Lonsdale, 20 June 1885; Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 423.

⁵⁹ Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*: Each object in Alfred's collection was detailed in this catalogue and afforded a physical description, information about history and provenance if known was also included.

⁶⁰ As for example at the Hamilton Palace sale of 1882.

his children.⁶¹ Overall however Alfred was less reliant upon the influences of dealers and advisers for the furnishing of Halton House than for example his uncle Mayer. Similarly Ferdinand did not generally purchase items at auction and instead commissioned dealers to secure items for him (including Agnew's, Annoot and Gale, Davis and Wertheimer). The dealer Barker was also involved in Ferdinand's early collecting, sharing his taste for decorative arts.⁶²

The Rothschild style: variations and development

Having noted the many similarities in the collecting tastes and stylistic choices of the English Rothschild family (and indeed their continental relatives) it must also be noted that every individual was unique in his choices and preferences. There were particular variations at the level of the individual family members and their residences. These variations depended on the particular sympathies of the owner in their collecting, the nature of the architecture and the use and function of the property. For example whilst Mayer and Alfred favoured French eighteenth-century paintings, Nathaniel did not. The renovation of an existing eighteenth-century house at Aston Clinton probably affected Anthony's decision to retain some classical interior decorative schemes, whereas the creation of a brand new property at Halton House enabled Alfred to create a flamboyant residence presented in the style of a French château both in its exterior and interior. Furthermore the use of Ascott House as a large traditional hunting lodge encouraged the preservation of the English character and presentation of its interiors.

According to John Martin Robinson 'Mentmore was of pioneer importance in the formation of the *Goût Rothschild*', and a 'whole series of Rothschild houses in Buckinghamshire followed it'.⁶³ It is indeed likely that within his family Mayer pioneered the Rococo-revival style in the Vale of Aylesbury and Mentmore House stood as a model for other Rothschild residences, inspiring the rest of his family. Gunnersbury Park, purchased in 1835, whilst still luxurious and glittering in its interior, was only an 'early exercise in French taste'.⁶⁴ Although Lionel's collections of French decorative arts and furniture were on display here,

⁶¹ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 76.

⁶² *Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection* (National Trust, 2003), introduction.

⁶³ Robinson, 'Architecture and Setting' in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Binney and Andreae, 5-6.

⁶⁴ Diana Davis, *Gunnersbury Park: a Rothschild House, 1835-1925* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Buckingham, 2010).

the house did not contain period rooms, *boiseries*, or antique textiles which so characterised the Louis-revival style. Instead the interiors were neoclassical, often with pastoral themes. Gunnersbury however was a family home in what was then the country and Lionel owned a sumptuous London town house, where he could create a lavish Francophile palace-like interior. Mentmore was the first English Rothschild residence to recreate a whole room in the French Rococo style, yet the mansion also contained rooms presented in other continental styles (for example the Italian Renaissance) which would similarly be favoured by other Rothschild family members. As has been noted Mayer had the opportunity, funds and inclination to create a brand new mansion with certain opulent and elaborate schemes of decoration in grand continental styles. Mentmore was not the only example of this use of the Francophile style by the Rothschild family in the 1850s: several of Mayer's continental relatives also employed it in their residences at this time - for example Anselm von Rothschild at Villa Grüneburg, Frankfurt from 1850 onwards, and James de Rothschild at the Château de Boulogne, Boulogne-sur-Seine, France from 1855.

It is likely that Mentmore House encouraged an enthusiasm for French Rococo-revival styles for the English Rothschild family and probably inspired Mayer's relatives: Francophile interiors were found increasingly frequently in Rothschild residences as the nineteenth century progressed. Mentmore however did not pioneer common elements of the Rothschild style identified above (including the quantity and quality of objects, the lavish and expensive nature of the interiors and collections, or their continental and historical character) as such features were already present at Gunnersbury Park in the 1850s, and for example at James de Rothschild's residence on the rue de Laffitte, Paris.

Importantly, the styles and objects chosen or degree of extravagance employed by the Rothschild family commonly varied between country and town houses, and between countries. As noted whilst Lionel chose to present his London townhouse as a dazzling and theatrical showcase with a marble hall, gold dining room, Gobelins tapestries and gold embossed leather hangings, his country property at Gunnersbury Park remained more elegant and subdued, reflecting its function as a family retreat. Nathaniel at Tring Park appears to have divided his paintings collection between his country and town residence, considering his Dutch and Flemish Old Master works more suited to town living in London and his English portraits more appropriate for his country mansion.

Furthermore whilst the basic elements of the Rothschild style as considered above were common to all Rothschild residences there were subtle differences in the emphasis of collectors of different nationalities. An adherence to the long-established tradition of the collecting of gold and silver Renaissance items for example was strongest in Germany and Austria, with figures such as Mayer Carl von Rothschild and Anselm von Rothschild. The Parisian Rothschilds chased Dutch Old Masters and eighteenth-century French decorative arts most fervently and in the 1860s James de Rothschild began to purchase certain Old Master works which had not until then been extensively collected by the Rothschild family (for example works by Rembrandt, Anthony van Dyck, Peter Paul Rubens, Jan van Eyck and Petrus Cristus). Finally the English Rothschilds set themselves apart with the acquisition of English eighteenth-century portraits.

Collecting tastes of the English Rothschild family could also alter subtly between generations. Lionel's preference for Dutch and Flemish paintings was not for example continued by his son Nathaniel at Tring Park, perhaps because he felt these particular objects were not suited to the manner of presentation he adopted at his residence. The interest in Dutch and Flemish Old Masters was indeed passing by the mid-nineteenth century, particularly among the wealthy, and Nathaniel seems to have followed this fashion. Alfred moved beyond the early tastes of his father for Greuze and began to collect many French eighteenth-century paintings which were often flamboyant and decorative (for example by Nicolas Lancret, Jean-Baptiste Pater and Antoine Watteau). Furthermore each of Lionel's three sons inherited a part of his small collection of English eighteenth-century portraits; they further continued this initial interest in such works. This was a taste which developed and gathered momentum for the family as the century progressed and the works increased in popularity. It is also evident that the flamboyance of the Rothschild style grew over time. Particularly in the residences of the Vale of Aylesbury, the interiors became more lavish as collections were passed from generation to generation and as architecture became bolder. In this the Rothschild family were following wider fashions of the period.

Finally a note must be added on the part which the women of the Rothschild family played in these collecting activities and the creation of the particular aesthetic seen in their residences in the Vale of Aylesbury. As noted in Chapter One Lionel's wife Charlotte and Anthony's wife Louisa were eager to establish country residences where they could

manage their own households and spend time away from their mother-in-law who resided at Gunnersbury. Thus their wishes may have in part motivated their husbands to purchase land in the Vale of Aylesbury. From the records which survive however it appears Rothschild women played a very small part in the collecting of art objects for the various residences belonging to the family. A large volume of correspondence has been left by Lionel's wife Charlotte and also by Nathaniel's wife Emma and Anthony's daughter Constance. Yet very little mention is made of collecting and art objects by them in these sources. Only in one letter from Charlotte to her son Leopold is there a brief mention of the furnishing of Rothschild mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury as she remarked on one of Mayer's purchases for Mentmore House: 'thirty magnificent Italian column, which Sir James Hudson bought for him; they formed part of the decoration of a church at Florence, and are to be transformed into a conservatory'.⁶⁵ The involvement of Mayer's daughter Hannah in the presentation of Mentmore House and the acquisition of further art and furniture after her father's death however was much greater and more active. In certain of her diary entries she indicates her interest in art and collecting: in 1867 for example she accompanied Ferdinand to view a collection of 'historical pictures in Kensington', including works by Reynolds, Hogarth and Kaufmann.⁶⁶ Also in 1867 she presented her mother with a pair of Sèvres vases for her birthday.⁶⁷ Hannah even created a detailed catalogue of Mentmore House, the 'monument of taste' which her father had made, to record the impressive collections for posterity and to 'honour his memory' after his death.⁶⁸ The contribution of Alice de Rothschild to the collections at Waddesdon should also be mentioned. Alice inherited Waddesdon and its contents at her brother Ferdinand's death in 1898. She added to the collections already housed at the mansion in a manner which was very close to the tastes of Ferdinand, and the wider Rothschild family. Her purchases included eighteenth-century French furniture, Savonnerie carpets, a large amount of Sèvres and Meissen porcelain, Limoges, Venetian glass, armour and English eighteenth-century paintings. In particular she sought to fill the gap left by Ferdinand's decision to gift his smoking Room collection to the British Museum. She also continued entertaining guests at the mansion. Analysis of the full influence of Hannah on the collections and presentation of Mentmore House and of Alice similarly at Waddesdon Manor at the end of

⁶⁵ RAL, RFamC/21, Charlotte de Rothschild to Leopold de Rothschild, Cambridge, 15/16 November 1866.

⁶⁶ Dalmeny House Archive, Diary of Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery, April 1867.

⁶⁷ Dalmeny House Archive, Diary of Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery, June 1867.

⁶⁸ Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883), introduction.

the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century however lies outside of the scope of this thesis.

Chapter Eight

Mentmore House

The Rothschild family and the Mentmore estate

The Mentmore estate lies six miles north-east of Aylesbury and three miles south of Leighton Buzzard in the county of Buckinghamshire. It was the first estate in the Vale of Aylesbury to be purchased by the Rothschild family and was the location for the first residence to be established by the family in the Vale. At Mentmore Mayer Amschel de Rothschild (1818-1874) built himself one of the 'great houses of the age', one which would 'set standards for the Rothschilds throughout Europe'.¹ This chapter will explore why Mayer decided to construct such a large and impressive new residence, and furthermore why he chose the overtly vernacular and historical Jacobethan architectural style. It will also identify that, rather than being the first stage of a wider and pre-conceived scheme of 'gentrification' by the Rothschild family, the acquisition of the Mentmore estate and construction of Mentmore House was a result of more material reasons. These include Mayer's wish to create a country home for his young family, for a base from which to participate in hunting and shooting, for a venue in which to entertain family and friends away from London, and as a location to display his growing art collections.

During the nineteenth century the various rooms of Mentmore House were generally influenced either by French decorative art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or an interpretation of the Italian Renaissance style. In general the house displayed an eclectic use of foreign decorative styles which was a distinct contrast to the English architecture of the exterior, as *The Builder* described in 1857:

Some departure has been made from the style of the exterior, in the decoration of the principal apartments, the dining-room, drawing-room, &c. being elaborately finished and decorated according to the styles which prevailed in France during the reigns of Francis I and Louis XIV, XV and XVI.²

¹ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 35.

² 'Mentmore', *The Builder*, XV (19 December 1857), 738-40.

The interior style of Mentmore House was designed specifically around the type of objects Mayer already owned and would continue to purchase. The decision to combine a distinctly English style exterior with continental style interiors at Mentmore is perhaps surprising and this chapter will question why this was done.

Purchase of the Mentmore estate by the Rothschild family

There is evidence to show that Mayer was the first of the Rothschild brothers to purchase land in the Vale of Aylesbury from the 1840s onwards. For example in September 1842 he purchased a small estate of several farms and cottages in the parishes of Mentmore and Wing from a Mr Werner for £5,000, as well as some parcels of land at Ledburn (also in the Mentmore parish) from Eleanor Villiers.³ Following these initial purchases Mayer continued to acquire neighbouring or adjoining small landholdings and farms.⁴ By the end of his life Mayer had built up a substantial estate, composed of almost all the land between Cheddington, Wingrave and Wing, a 5,000 acre holding.⁵ It was in 1850 that he made his most significant and largest purchase of land in the area when he bought the 'manor and advowson of Mentmore' for £12,400 from the trustees of the three daughters of William Harcourt (1801-1847).⁶ It was here that Mayer decided to construct a mansion.

³ CBS, Bucks D94-26, Conveyance of a messuage lands and tithes at Ledburn in the County of Bucks, Mrs Eleanor Villiers to the Baron Mayer Rothschild, 29 September 1842; CBS, Bucks D94-26, Covenant for production of deeds, Mrs Eleanor Villiers to the Baron Mayer de Rothschild, 16 September 1842; RAL, RFam, 109/52, Richard Dawes to Mayer de Rothschild, 15 October 1842; Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883), introduction.

⁴ See for example RAL, XI/109/72/2, Thomas Hart to Mayer de Rothschild, Ascott, 7 August 1849; RAL, XI/109/48A/1/57, Lionel de Rothschild to Mayer de Rothschild, Frankfurt, August 1844; RAL, XI/109/52A/2/42, Sir Henry Verney to Mayer de Rothschild, Claydon House, Bucks, 6 May 1845; RAL, RFam, 109/56/28, J. S. Brown to Mayer de Rothschild, 26 January 1844.

⁵ See for example CBS, D94-1; D94-6; D-94-8; D94-10; D94-11; D94-12; D94-18; D94-21; D94-24; D94-25; D94-26; D94-49, all of which contain deeds relating to the sale of land in the area to Mayer de Rothschild, between 1842 and 1851; See also HALS, Plans and references of the estate of the late James Field, 1843, the plan of which is marked with the lands of 'Barons Rothschild'.

⁶ The estate, or 'manor and advowson of Mentmore', was comprised of 700 acres and valued by Harcourt's agents at £19,000 (but by Mayer's at £12,250); CBS, D94-6, Conveyance of the Manor and Advowson of Mentmore in the County of Bucks and of Certain Lands in that Parish, William Henry Frederick Cavendish Esq. to the Baron Mayer de Rothschild, 26 November 1850; RAL, RFam, 109/52, Richard Dawes to Mayer de Rothschild, 15 October 1842.



Figure 61: Mentmore House, South front, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Architecture and style

Architect

As noted in an earlier chapter Mayer commissioned Sir Joseph Paxton as the architect for his new mansion. By the 1850s Paxton was widely known as a successful and innovative new architect, using the latest modern materials to create impressive results. He quickly came to enjoy fame in the public sphere as a result of his design and building work at Chatsworth and for the Great Exhibition building: by October 1851 he was inundated with ‘invitations to dinner, requests to paint his portrait, and demands to make public speeches’.⁷ Perhaps Mayer had chosen Paxton because of his growing fame at Chatsworth, further enhanced by the Great Exhibition building. This structure had clearly caught the eye of Mayer’s nephew, Ferdinand de Rothschild, as he wrote in his *Reminiscences*: ‘Sir Joseph Paxton’s crystal building was the first of its kind, and a more aerial or graceful structure could not be imagined or equalled’.⁸ Kate Colquhoun believes that Mayer ‘wanted the most famous architect in Britain to build him a vast, expensive stone mansion to outrival all others’. This is a likely reason for his employment, considering Mayer’s wish to make a statement with his new residence.⁹ Also notable is that Paxton had been creating buildings that were intended to attract attention and which exploited the latest technologies: these were certainly qualities that Mayer desired for his

⁷ Kate Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009), p. 174.

⁸ Waddesdon Manor Archives, ref. acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences* (1897).

⁹ Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise*, p. 174.

new mansion. Furthermore it is likely Mayer deliberately sought to employ an English architect, one that could produce for him an English-style residence in the aristocratic tradition, but who could combine this with the innovative use of modern technologies to provide comfort and luxury. Paxton was joined in the commission by his son-in-law George Stokes who worked on the more detailed plans for the house and probably designed the internal arrangement.¹⁰



Figure 62: Mentmore House, East or Entrance Front, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 63: Mentmore House, East or Entrance Front, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Construction

Notably Mayer also chose an English building firm, George Myers of Lambeth, to construct his English country mansion. Mayer probably encountered Myers at the Great Exhibition

¹⁰ Kennedy, 'The success of excess', p. 74.

and here identified him as an individual he wished to engage for Mentmore, as may have been the case with Paxton.¹¹ In addition Paxton knew Myers, as they had worked together at Burton Closes Hall, Derbyshire. Myer's tender for £15,472 for Mentmore was accepted, though in fact the final cost for labour has been estimated at £20,000 (as well as up to £30,000 for materials).¹²



¹¹ Mayer loaned certain *objets d'art* in his collections to the Great Exhibition when it opened in 1851 and so was evidently highly involved in the project at many stages

¹² RAL, 000/848/16, The Baron M.A. Rothschild and Mr G.E.O. Myers: Copy contract for the erection of a mansion at Mentmore, 24 October 1851; Bidwell, *Mentmore Towers*, p. 6.



Figure 64: Plans, elevations and sections of Mentmore Buckinghamshire the seat of Baron Meyer A. de Rothschild, 1866 (NAL, General Collection, 49.A.51)

Influences

Mentmore House was designed by Paxton in the English Renaissance-revival style as a magnificent statement of ‘Jacobethan’ opulence.¹³ Significantly Mayer and Paxton selected a style for the house that was modelled largely on Wollaton Hall, a sixteenth-century mansion near Nottingham, built in the English Renaissance style. *The Builder* of 1857 noted of Mentmore: ‘The style adopted by the desire of the builder is that...of which Wollaton Hall is perhaps the finest example’.¹⁴



Figure 65: The Exterior of Mentmore House (‘Mentmore’, *The Builder*, XV [19 December 1857], p. 738)

¹³ Robinson, ‘Architecture and Setting’, in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Binney and Andreae, pp. 5-6.

¹⁴ ‘Mentmore’, *The Builder*, XV (19 December 1857), 738-40.



Figure 66: Wollaton Hall, Nottingham

Wollaton Hall had been built between 1580 and 1588 for Sir Francis Willoughby (1546-1596) to the design of Robert Smythson (1535-1614). Paxton copied the basic plan of Wollaton (which centres on its high central hall, surrounded by four towers) to produce a similar two-storey block plan with central Great Hall and three-storey angle towers for Mentmore House. Certain other ornate facade features of Wollaton were also included in the design: the banded columns and pilasters, mullioned and transomed windows, rooftop balustrades, and strapwork gables to the angle towers. The same Ancaster stone is used at Mentmore House as at Wollaton, with York and Portland stone for steps and paving.

The style and design of Wollaton Hall was a good choice for any gentleman wishing to create an English country house in the mid-nineteenth century. Such an attitude was expressed by architectural writer James Ferguson in 1862. Concerning Wollaton he asserts:

The lower part of the design is probably the happiest conception of its age in this country; and if repeated with the purity of detail we could now apply to it, would make a singularly pleasing type of the residence of an English nobleman.¹⁵

Although Wollaton Hall was a suitable prototype in some respects for Mentmore House Paxton did not simply produce a direct copy. As *The Builder* put it in 1857: 'A difference in the combination and arrangement has contributed to produce grouping of a picturesque

¹⁵ James Ferguson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* (London: J. Murray, 1862), p. 251.

character and outline'.¹⁶ A dominant exterior feature of Wollaton Hall (perhaps its most striking) is the massive central tower which rises over its Great Hall and forms the 'prospect room'. Despite the admiration for Wollaton, instead of this central tower Mentmore was designed with a double-storey Grand Hall. This adaption was probably made because Paxton felt a central tower would have made it impossible to light any hall adequately. Also unlike Wollaton, Mentmore does not stand alone but instead additional wings were attached to its south-east and north-east corners, creating an entrance forecourt.



Figure 67: Mentmore House, Interior of the Grand Hall, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

In designing Mentmore Paxton did not exclusively depend on Wollaton for inspiration. Instead the house is built to a highly individual design, resulting from Paxton's knowledge of several great country houses. Longleat House must also be mentioned for example. Built between 1568 and 1580, also by Smythson (this time for Sir John Thynne [1515-1580]). Longleat (along with Wollaton Hall and Hardwick Hall) is one of the earliest examples of the English interpretation of Renaissance architecture. John Harris notes that 'it could be called England's first contribution since the English Gothic to Northern European architecture' and its influences on Wollaton, and thus Mentmore, must be noted.¹⁷

¹⁶ 'Mentmore', *The Builder*, XV (19 December 1857), 738-40.

¹⁷ John Harris, *The Design of the English Country House 1620-1920* (London: Trefoil Books, 1985), p.154.



Figure 68: Longleat House, Wiltshire

Smythson was also the architect of Hardwick Hall. Built in the 1550s Hardwick was a conspicuous statement of the wealth and power of its owner, Bess of Hardwick. Paxton knew it well (probably intimately) because it belonged to his patron, the 6th Duke of Devonshire, and was certainly influenced by it in his designs for Mentmore. Of all the properties which can be considered as influences on Mentmore Hardwick was probably the one that Paxton knew best. One of Hardwick's most famous features is its windows, which were exceptionally large and numerous at a time when glass was a luxury. Paxton's decision to include so many windows at Mentmore brings Hardwick to mind.



Figure 69: Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire

A further influence and indeed prototype for Paxton's designs for Mentmore must have been Highclere Castle, redesigned just before Mentmore in 1839-42 for the 3rd Earl of Carnarvon. Paxton had been taken to Highclere by the 6th Duke of Devonshire in 1835 and was aware of the work that was undertaken here in the following years. The Earl of

Carnarvon had inherited a classical Georgian mansion, yet it was not to his taste and in 1839 he employed Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860) to replace the facades. For Highclere Barry took inspiration from the non-gabled variety of Elizabethan architecture (and from houses such as Wollaton Hall) and added other design elements and motifs of the Italianate style. Barry called his new style 'Anglo-Italian'.¹⁸

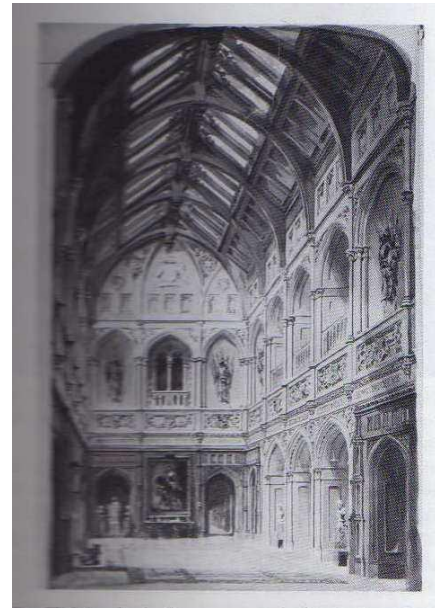


Figure 70: Highclere Castle, Berkshire

The Renaissance theme is evident in many elements of Highclere: the Great Hall (a well-lit, top-glazed double-storey room) is modelled on an Italian Renaissance central courtyard, complete with arcades and loggias.

Barry was also responsible for The Reform Club, Pall Mall, London, of 1837. This building may also have been an inspiration to Paxton in his designs for Mentmore's Grand Hall. Barry was again inspired by Italian Renaissance architecture in his design and externally the building bears a distinct resemblance to Michelangelo's Palazzo Farnese (completed 1589) which Barry had studied closely.¹⁹

¹⁸ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 130.

¹⁹ Barry adapted and improved this Italian model however: inside the building a vast square atrium rises the full height of the building (reminiscent of an Italian courtyard), but instead of being open to the elements it is covered by a glass roof.

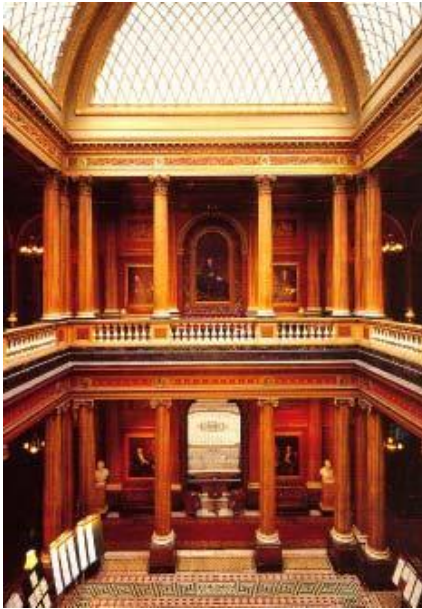


Figure 71: Reform Club, Pall Mall, London

Renaissance-revival architecture

Barry's Highclere Castle and Paxton's Mentmore House both belong to a genre of architecture that has been termed the neo-Renaissance. The two properties further belong to a style within the neo-Renaissance umbrella which was specific to England: broadly this style revived and reproduced elements of High Elizabethan architecture.²⁰ It is Barry who is often credited with introducing the neo-Renaissance style to England with his design of the Travellers Club on Pall Mall (1829-32) next door to his Reform Club. A grand staircase was to become one of the features of neo-Renaissance design and open and arcaded Renaissance courtyards also inspired architects. These were adapted to domestic use by the use of glass so that they could be reproduced as high-ceilinged halls with glazed roofs. Such features were evident at Mentmore.

²⁰ This term in turn refers to the English architecture of the late-sixteenth century and early-seventeenth century when traditional Tudor architecture was being challenged by new Italian Renaissance influences.



Figure 72: Travellers Club, Pall Mall, London



Figure 73: Mentmore House, Grand Staircase looking south-west from half landing, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 74: Mentmore House, Grand Staircase half landing looking north-west from 1st floor, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 75: Mentmore House, Roof of Grand Hall from south-west tower looking north-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Robert Kerr, once Professor of the Arts of Construction at King's College, London, wrote in 1864 that the nineteenth century was 'the age of Revival'. He clarified his meaning, adding: 'Our age [the nineteenth century] has a very notable style of its own, and a very novel one; the style of this miscellaneous connoisseurship of ours, the style of instinct superseded by learning.'²¹ Girouard considers that in the nineteenth century 'much the

²¹ Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House* (1864), p. 56.

most popular source of inspiration was the Gothic, Tudor or Elizabethan manor house.²² He further writes that even by 1850 it was considered a gentleman's house should be 'substantial, serious and preferably in style associated with the traditions of English country life': the Gothic, Tudor and Elizabethan therefore met these requirements.²³

Concerning the Gothic style, Girouard also adds that 'houses in the Gothic style had the extra advantage that, as a result of the writings of Pugin, Ruskin and others, Gothic was increasingly associated both with Christianity and with truthfulness'.²⁴ He finds that if a man 'saw himself as an English gentleman, he would tend to build Elizabethan, if as a Christian English gentleman, then Gothic'.²⁵ This statement is particularly pertinent when applied to Mentmore House and Mayer de Rothschild who was of course Jewish.

The Elizabethan-revival movement grew and flourished in Britain, at a time when the classical tradition was declining, but the more serious Gothic-revival was in its infancy. This revival of Elizabethan period architecture in Victorian England has been well documented by several authors. Jill Franklin's research leads her to believe that 'as far as numbers go this range of styles was the outstanding success of the century from 1820 to 1920'.²⁶ The real break-through for a concerted revived interest in Elizabethan architecture came in the 1830s and 40s. Several authors began to write books and studies which campaigned for a return to the style of architecture of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century, and all the qualities for which it stood. The first nineteenth-century publication to examine favourably Elizabethan and Jacobean architecture alone was the 1833 *Domestic Architecture of the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I* by the architect T. H. Clarke.²⁷ Other publications followed, describing and praising Elizabethan architectural design.²⁸ C. J. Richardson - a pupil of Sir John Soane and one of the most enthusiastic of writers to praise the style - produced his *Observations on the Architecture of England during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth and James I* in 1837.²⁹ Further

²² Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 268.

²³ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 13.

²⁴ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 268.

²⁵ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 53.

²⁶ Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*, p. 2.

²⁷ T. H. Clarke, *Domestic Architecture of the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I* (London: Priestley and Weale, 1833)

²⁸ Mark Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', in *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. by John Summerson (London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1968), pp. 13-27.

²⁹ C. J. Richardson, *Observations on the Architecture of England during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth and James I* (London: Weale, 1837); Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', pp. 13-27.

publications with similar aims appeared throughout the 1840s, including those by Henry Shaw, Joseph Nash, E. B. Lamb and John Clayton. By 1839 numerous neo-Renaissance houses had been built and more followed in quick succession during the 1840s.³⁰

Authors who wrote in support of the style at this time generally articulated three main reasons why it deserved such a return to favour. Firstly they agreed it was pleasingly picturesque. Richardson wrote:

For the parsonage house, the rural and the sequestered villa, amidst coppices and garden grounds, the Elizabethan style is not only admissible but in accordance with the *genius loci*: its quaint gables, fantastic pinnacles and pendants; its intricate parapets and grotesque carvings connect themselves intimately with the surrounding scenery, and form a picture far more readily and agreeably than uniform symmetrical objects.³¹

Secondly Elizabethan houses were considered to be convenient, partly because their plans were often so irregular that adapting them to the various needs of different country houses was easier than for a symmetrically classical plan.³² Kerr wrote in 1864 that 'it can be affirmed that the chief consideration which brought the Tudor and Elizabethan mansion as a whole into fashion was the obvious superiority of its plan.'³³ Their convenience it was said also lay in the fact that they often had numerous windows 'admitting an abundance of light and air'.³⁴

The last, and probably most significant, reason that the Elizabethan style was so admired at this time owes to its associations. In 1846 Loudon wrote that 'as a British domestic style it has more interesting associations connected with it than any other'.³⁵ Over the course of the nineteenth century a fascination for historical times in Britain grew: as Peter Mandler writes a 'peculiar sensibility for the past gripped the nation by the 1840s'.³⁶ This interest in

³⁰ Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', pp. 13-27.

³¹ Richardson, *Observations on the Architecture of England during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth and James I*, p. 8.

³² Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', pp. 13-27.

³³ Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, p.56.

³⁴ Clarke, *Domestic Architecture of the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I*, preface.

³⁵ Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', pp. 13-27; J. C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1846), p.1124.

³⁶ Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*, p. 22.

national heritage grew throughout the nineteenth century and focussed in particular on the Tudor and Stuart period. As Mandler has it this period was perceived as civilised and refined and lay between 'medieval rudeness and aristocratic over-refinement'.³⁷ This imagined period became known as the 'Olden Time' and appealed both to patriotic and romantic sentiments which were rising high in nineteenth-century England. As the eighteenth century Grand Tour went out of fashion the ideal of the man of taste was replaced with the ideal of the 'English Gentleman'. In architecture both the 'cold and proud' Palladian and medieval Gothic styles began to be rejected by this 'Victorian idea of Heritage'.³⁸ Now it seemed appropriate that an English Gentleman should have a neo-Elizabethan house, with its suggestion of the 'old English hospitality' and association with the Olden Time which was so much admired.³⁹ Kerr again wrote that 'the old English model, with all its crudities, was English; and such a thing as the Pompeian house, with all its refinement, altogether foreign and antiquated'.⁴⁰ New 'Tudor' or 'Elizabethan' houses began to appear from the 1840s onwards and became widely fashionable. Franklin further suggests that 'the style was felt to be essentially English and adopting it marked a patron's link with the manorial past and with the world of the old landed families'.⁴¹ An evident and highly public example of this attitude was expressed in the choice of the Tudorbethan style for the Palace of Westminster by a committee of Peers and Members of Parliament.⁴²

We cannot be sure if it was Mayer who conceived and drove the design of his new house in the Jacobethan style, although an article in *The Builder* of 1857 does record that 'the style adopted by desire of the Baron for the exterior is that which prevailed during the early part of the reign of James I'.⁴³ Mayer certainly knew something of country house architecture: whilst at Cambridge he visited the properties of his friends, and had also seen Warwick Castle in early adulthood.⁴⁴ The first stage of his 'wedding tour' with his wife Juliana was spent in England and it was during this trip he visited Castle Howard, Hardwick Hall, Belvoir Castle and Berkeley Castle. In a letter to Lionel he remarked of the latter: 'very ancient, one of the best specimens of the middle ages I have seen in this

³⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁹ Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', pp. 13-27.

⁴⁰ Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, chapter XI.

⁴¹ Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House and its Plan*, p. 2.

⁴² Girouard, 'Attitudes to Elizabethan Architecture 1600-1900', pp. 13-27.

⁴³ 'Mentmore', *The Builder*, XV (19 December 1857), 738-40.

⁴⁴ Ireland, *Plutocrats*, p. 204.

country, almost superior to Warwick.⁴⁵ No other evidence survives to indicate whether Mayer had a primary role in the choice of Mentmore's style. We may suppose that, as was not uncommon, architect and owner worked together to create a design which fulfilled the owner's expectations and desires.

Most importantly Mayer chose a vernacular style, one which did not make a foreign statement as several later Rothschild houses in the area would. In its architectural style Mentmore was formal and luxurious, even aristocratic: it was a definite statement of Englishness, and deliberately recalled past styles. The impression created was one of historical legitimacy (and a sense of nationalism) as well as of grandeur and affluence. Indeed Mary Miers is correct in her suggestion that 'architectural nostalgia (as expressed by the Jacobethan style) went hand in hand with the image of the Victorian landowner as a munificent patriarchal figure'.⁴⁶ These qualities being so overt in the design it was probably Mayer's intention to emphasise through his new country property his Englishness (and appreciation of English architecture) and status as a confident landowner who 'fitted in' and had money enough to spend on such a project.⁴⁷

Of course it is clear that Mentmore was emulating a large aristocratic house, yet it was also amongst the first large *nouveau-riche* houses of the nineteenth century. Whilst the house was vast, imposing, and newly built, it did not contrast with other large English-style houses in the nature of its architecture however. In his choice of style for Mentmore Mayer was emphasising his wealth, status and personal taste, and downplaying his foreign background or *nouveau-riche* position.

Mentmore estate buildings

As well as constructing the main mansion Mayer also commissioned modern farm buildings, lodges, cottages, stable blocks, kennels and gatehouses. The designs for the majority of buildings came from George Stokes in the 1850s, from George Devey (1820-1886), who took over as clerk of works at Mentmore in about 1860, and from John Aspell,

⁴⁵ RAL, XI/109/74, Mayer de Rothschild to Lionel and Anthony de Rothschild, Cheltenham, 1850.

⁴⁶ Miers, *The English Country House*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Prevost-Marcihacy, 'Rothschild Architecture in England, France, Austria and Italy', pp. 245-264.

who continued Devey's style into the late 1870s.⁴⁸ The style of the estate buildings were generally marked by varied rooflines and the impression that the buildings had been extended over a number of generations. This gave a sense of Englishness and of an established heritage to the estate, which clearly appealed to the Rothschild family.⁴⁹



Figure 76: Mentmore, East Lodge, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 77: Mentmore, South Lodge, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

⁴⁸ *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p. 473; Stokes was paid for much work completed on the Mentmore Estate throughout the 1860s, see for example RAL, XII/41/5/1, XII/41/5/2, XII/41/5/3, XII/41/6/1, 1856-1864; this was also the case for Devey, see RAL, Mayer: Receipted accounts, XII/41/6/2/197-315, 1868-1869.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, 'The success of excess', p. 74.



Figure 78: Mentmore, Dairy, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Interiors and collections

To what extent Mayer himself drove the interior scheme of his mansion is key to considering why Mentmore's interiors were presented as discussed. Mayer's particular preferences certainly drove the interior design and furnishing of his country mansion both prior to and after its construction. Whilst *The Builder* of 1857 judged the historical style of the exterior of Mentmore House to be Mayer's own choice it made no mention of his role in leading the decoration of its interiors.⁵⁰ In her *Recollections* Mayer's niece, Constance, Lady Battersea, suggests that he took a keen interest in the interiors of his new residence, writing that Mayer 'was determined upon making his home at Mentmore into a veritable palace of fine art.'⁵¹ Mayer had begun collecting early in his life and perhaps had the construction of his mansion in mind from an early stage. Even before Mentmore House was constructed Mayer's collecting focussed on art objects and furniture of continental origins, from the Italian High Renaissance to the French eighteenth-century. There is some evidence to support the suggestion that some of Mayer's choices in interior decoration were driven by the *objets d'art* and furniture he purchased while the house was being built. That Mayer's tastes in these areas favoured objects of a continental nature was reflected in the settings he created for them. Mentmore was to a certain extent a 'Renaissance-style container specifically designed and fastidiously detailed' to hold Mayer's collections.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Battersea, *Reminiscences*, p. 49.

⁵² John Frederick Harris, 'Incomparable objets d'art' in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Marcus Binney and Sophie Andreae (Save Britain's Heritage, 1977), p. 15.

It is important to consider that the combination of Elizabethan architecture with French or Italian interiors and collections was not a model unique to the English Rothschild family at this time. Certain rooms of the Elizabethan Longleat, Dorset, for example were decorated in the Italian Renaissance style to house the collections of the 4th Marquess of Bath who favoured Italian works of art.⁵³ At the Jacobean and Gothic style Harlaxton Manor, Lincolnshire (built in the 1830s), Renaissance styles were revived for the interior decorative schemes: its owner Gregory Gregory had toured England and Europe seeking inspiration, ideas and objects for his residence, several rooms combined old and new *boiseries* with uniquely exuberant continental style plasterwork.⁵⁴ As well as being a logical choice resulting from the abundant supply of continental objects and furnishings, the choice of such styles for the interior of a country house perhaps also aimed to reveal the cosmopolitan and learned outlook of the owner, and emphasise a link to European learning and refinement.

The particular continental styles and objects for which Mayer showed a preference enabled him to form a connection with historical periods and individuals and generate a sense of glamour and wealth in his imposing country mansion. The interiors of Mentmore House were designed to recreate settings for his collections in the styles of the periods he admired. This interest in the Renaissance and Baroque may well have stemmed from an historical enthusiasm. Various rooms of Mentmore House employed 'genuine elements taken from interiors of those periods': for example the *boiseries* of the Dining Room and ceilings or chimneypieces of other rooms.⁵⁵ In addition the French Rococo and Italian Renaissance decorative schemes (and collections installed in them) created extravagant and luxurious interiors. No doubt these interiors were designed to entertain and to impress guests, indeed Mayer intended his collection to be viewed and admired by visitors: his brother Nathaniel related in 1863 that 'after dinner the works of art were as a matter of course looked at and admired'.⁵⁶ The image of Mentmore as a magnificent, grand house, filled with the best objects, and as a residence where the owner's wealth and extravagant

⁵³ These lavish settings were created by Jeffry Wyattville (1766-1840) and John Crace (1808-1889).

⁵⁴ The house had been designed by Anthony Salvin (1799-1881) who merged Gothic, Jacobean and Baroque styles to create a dramatic and exuberant structure. Eventually Salvin was replaced by William Burn (1789-1870) who was responsible for much of the interior decoration: Geoffrey Beard and others, *Harlaxton Manor* (Grantham, 1984); Jill Allibone, *Anthony Salvin: Pioneer of Gothic Revival Architecture* (Cambridge, 1998); Tim Knox, 'A Palace for an "English Country Squire"', *Early Designs for Harlaxton Manor, Lincolnshire*, *Architectural History*, 36 (1993).

⁵⁵ Kennedy, 'The success of excess', p. 76.

⁵⁶ RAL, 000/12/29, Nathaniel de Rothschild to Lionel and Charlotte de Rothschild, Torquay, 16 January 1863.

taste were on show was widely recognised. A journal of 1879 described the house as 'most luxuriously furnished and elaborately decorated'.⁵⁷ Art historian and critic Elizabeth, Lady Eastlake went to Mentmore in 1872 and wrote of her visit noting 'What a palace it is! And filled like a museum with every form of art and vertu'.⁵⁸ She added that she didn't believe the 'Medici in all their glory were so grandly lodged'.⁵⁹

Entrance Hall and Grand Hall



Figure 79: East Entrance Hall from south-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 80: Interior of the Grand Hall, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

⁵⁷ H. E., 'Mentmore Towers', *The Gardener's Chronicle*, 21 June 1879.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth, Lady Eastlake to Sir Austen H. Layard, 8 February 1872: see *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake*, ed. by Julie Sheldon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 357.

⁵⁹ Ibid.



Figure 81: Interior of the Grand Hall, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Both the Entrance Hall and Grand Hall of Mentmore House were presented in a way which supports the conclusion that Mentmore was designed specifically to house Mayer's collections, and to create an impression of luxury and opulence. The Entrance Hall, lined with Caen stone and paved with Sicilian and Rouge Royal marble, recalled the Italian Renaissance and had been specifically designed to display the collection of antique marbles and sculpture that Mayer had acquired from Florence through the dealer Adolphe Boucneau (1820-1886).⁶⁰ Mayer was evidently eager to install impressive items to adorn his new mansion and make a clear statement of grandeur in the first room which the visitor encountered upon entering his mansion.

The influence of the objects Mayer already possessed and acquired (or those which had been purchased for him) in driving stylistic furnishing choices for the Grand Hall is evident. For example in a letter of the 1850s Barker noted that he had 'found' tapestries which would 'entirely occupy the walls above the dados and match the furniture'.⁶¹ A rare surviving letter from Mentmore's architect, Sir Joseph Paxton, reveals that in 1855 Mayer

⁶⁰ The Belgian Adolphe Joseph Boucneau had arrived in England in 1840 and was naturalized as British on 28 May 1860. Listed in Mayer's receipts as a 'sculptor and marble decorator' it is probable Boucneau was employed by him from 1856-1862: National Archive Kew, HO 1/95, Certificate 3241, Naturalization Papers: Boucneau, Adolphe Joseph, 28 May 1860; National Archive Kew, Public Record Office HO/2, Aliens Act 1836: Certificates of Arrival of Aliens, 1840.

⁶¹ Dalmeny House Archive, Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild, no date (c. 1850s), in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Grand Hall.

requested the ceiling of the Grand Hall be raised in order to accommodate these tapestries.⁶² Paxton agreed but advised Mayer:

These alterations are entirely in accordance with your own desire, and that I of course consented to them. I have given you to understand that they would be an expensive operation and that I have not suggested any expensive addition or alteration of my own accord.⁶³

Evidently for Mayer the display of these tapestries at Mentmore House was highly desirable, so much so that he was prepared to alter the appearance of his new mansion, to much expense, in order to accommodate them. Barker also acquired three large Venetian ceiling lanterns for this room in 1851, noting in a letter of that year that 'the lanterns are now in full...they will look magnificent'.⁶⁴ Such objects further dictated the interior style of this grand space.



Figure 82: Grand Hall at Mentmore by Henry William Brewer, c. 1863

⁶² Alexander Barker had written to Mayer de Rothschild describing some tapestries he had found (12 pieces, each 8ft by 10ft) which would 'entirely occupy the walls above the dados and match the furniture': Dalmeny House Archive, Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild (no date), in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883).

⁶³ Dalmeny House Archive, Sir Joseph Paxton to Mayer de Rothschild, 3 March 1855, in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883). The cost of these alterations is not known.

⁶⁴ Dalmeny House Archive, Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild, 1851, in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Grand Hall.



Figure 83: Hannah de Rothschild in the Grand Hall at Mentmore by E. Macimer, c. 1869

In addition the Grand Hall was intended to impress and entertain, and this is another reason why the grand Italian Renaissance style was chosen for its architectural features and furnishings. It was of great proportions, and so was consequently filled with large objects (such as a substantial marble chimneypiece, a large Savonnerie carpet, the Venetian ceiling lanterns and the vast Gobelins tapestry hangings, all of which deliberately created a grand impression). The historical associations of many items and Mayer's enthusiasm for this may also explain their presence in the room, for example the chimneypiece (which supposedly came from Peter Paul Rubens's house in Antwerp and was designed by the painter himself), the tapestries (seventeenth-century copies of a series made for Cardinal Mazarin), the Savonniere carpet (modified during the French Revolution to remove a royal cipher), the Venetian lanterns (made for the barge of the Doges of Venice) and certain items of furniture (such as eight seventeenth-century Italian chairs from the Doge's Palace, Venice).⁶⁵ Additional objects noted in this room in 1883 included Venetian marbles (similar to those of the Entrance Hall) and Italian furniture spanning the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Such items complemented the Italian Renaissance style of the architecture, and added opulence to the overall appearance of the room. There were also a limited number of French eighteenth-century tables and chairs, as well as a large clock of the Louis XVI period, rising to over 7ft and placed

⁶⁵ Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), pp. 5-6. These latter outsized chairs of elaborately carved and gilded wood had come from the Palazzo Ducale, Venice. Disraeli declared 'and such chairs – Titian alone could paint them': Bidwell, *Mentmore Towers*, p. 11.

centrally in the room: such French items however were not in abundance, presumably being considered less in keeping with the Italian Renaissance focus of the room.

Alongside the antique furnishings, art objects and furniture in this room were also examples of nineteenth-century furniture: Mayer purchased nineteenth-century objects (often imitation pieces of the French eighteenth-century style) for all of the rooms of his house from certain well-known suppliers.⁶⁶ These objects, whilst still creating a sense of opulence, would be used by the family and their guests on a daily basis. As Baron Guy de Rothschild (1909-2007) notes, the Grand Hall was also the main 'living room' for the family, and was as a result 'where nonchalant splendour became a casual condition of everyday life'.⁶⁷

Opulence and drama was further added to the room with Mayer's enthusiasm for *Schatzkammer* objects. There were numerous sixteenth and seventeenth-century gold and silver clocks, cups, goblets, ewers, vases, tazze and statuettes on display in this room. The majority of the objects were of German manufacture, although around a quarter were English or Italian. The works were ornamental and intended to create impact through their deliberate collective display. Mayer probably owned a good proportion of these items before Mentmore was constructed, further revealing that the interior presentation of his mansion was directed by the objects he already possessed.

Mayer's tastes for these German or Italian precious objects probably owed much to his background, early experiences of travel, and the collecting of *Schatzkammer* objects which had long been an interest of the wider Rothschild family: as part of his early business endeavours Mayer's grandfather Mayer Amschel Rothschild had dealt with such objects in Frankfurt.⁶⁸ Mayer had also spent his early adulthood travelling the continent for education,

⁶⁶ These included the furniture dealer Henry Durlacher, furniture maker Louis-Auguste Beurdeley, and the cabinet making firms of Nixon and Rhodes and Annot and Gale.

⁶⁷ Guy de Rothschild, *The Whims of Fortune: the Memoirs of Guy de Rothschild* (Random House: New York, 1985), pp. 9-10.

⁶⁸ Egon Caesar Cont Corti has suggested that the Rothschilds' collecting of *Schatzkammer* objects in the nineteenth century was rooted in the 'profitable dealings in numismatic collectors prizes by the eighteenth-century founder of the Rothschild house': Count Egon Caesar Corti, *The Rise of the House of Rothschild 1770-1830*, ed. by Brian and Beatrix Lunn (London: Gollancz, 1928), pp. 4-15; Michael Hall also writes that it was a function of the early Rothschild business in Frankfurt to 'provide gold and silver coinage for the Allied armies fighting Napoleon, coinage derived partly from re-using many objects of silver, silver-gilt and gold...': Michael Hall, 'The Rothschild Collection at Mentmore' in *Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Magnificent Silver-gilt, Objects of Vertu and Miniatures from the Rothschild and Rosebery Collection, Mentmore: the Property of the Rosebery Family Trust* (London: Sotheby, Parke, Bernet & Co., 1999), 7-14.

work and for leisure: before his marriage he had visited Leipzig, Heidelberg and Frankfurt. It is perhaps here his taste for such continental objects was encouraged. He was also in close contact with his continental relations and must have viewed their collections which contained these objects. The tastes of Mayer's elder brothers Lionel and Anthony also influenced his own: both had studied at Universities in Göttingen and Strasbourg and had undertaken an extended trip in the mid-1820s around continental Europe. Lionel in particular favoured German *Schatzkammer* objects, his collection having been given a head start in 1836 when he acquired a variety of precious German works from his father-in-law Carl von Rothschild (1788-1855) of Naples.

Mayer especially admired 'curiosities' and often the best pieces in this category were of German manufacture rather than French.⁶⁹ Many of Mayer's *Schatzkammer* objects carried connections to European royalty: for example a silver figure of Charles II's court dwarf, a German silver lion figurine associated with William III, and a German equestrian statuette with removable heads of Gustav Adolphus, King of Sweden and the Count of Wallenstein.



Figure 84: German silver gilt heraldic lion rampant, 1690, presented to the City of Berne by William III (RAL, 000/924/21 Album of photographs compiled by Charlotte de Rothschild, no date [c.1870s])

⁶⁹ Harris, 'Incomparable objets d'art', in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Binney and Andreae, p. 15.



Figure 85: German silver gilt owl with victim, 1690, presented to the City of Berne by William III (RAL, 000/924/21 Album of photographs compiled by Charlotte de Rothschild, no date [c.1870s])



Figure 86: German silver parcel-gilt equestrian statuette, seventeenth century (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 87: Silver statue of Charles II's dwarf, Sir Jeffrey Hudson (RAL, 000/924/21 Album of photographs compiled by Charlotte de Rothschild, no date [c.1870s])

The ownership of such items (as well as furniture previously owned by royalty or French aristocracy, and portraits of such individuals) reveals Mayer's keen interest in collecting works of art with historical associations: indeed it was a common tendency for Rothschild family members to seek out such items in this period. It is also probable Mayer appreciated the intrinsic monetary value of the objects and collected them for this reason: a letter from Barker to Mayer reveals such a motive:

Tho' I well know your most inconceivable tenacity of the precious metals...I predict that the pretty things you have bought will someday cause you more satisfaction than any money you ever spent except when you purchased yr. wedding ring.⁷⁰

In collecting so many precious objects Mayer created somewhat of a Renaissance *Kunstammer* at Mentmore; the rich fabrics and sumptuous furniture he also installed provided a background for these exotic items.

On an early visit to Mentmore Disraeli was also highly complementary of the Great Hall:

⁷⁰ Hall, 'The Rothschild Collection at Mentmore', 7-14.

The Hall appears to me the masterpiece of modern art and decoration – glowing with colour, lit by gorgeous Venetian lamps [...] glittering with its precious contents, and yet the most comfortable and liveable apartment in the world.⁷¹

A further luxury which featured in this part of the mansion was the expensive and innovative glass installed in the ceiling and doors of the Grand Hall which made a deliberate and truly spectacular impression upon the visitor. Further grandeur was added with the imposing two-level Grand Staircase, the walls of which were hung with eighteenth-century Beauvais tapestries commissioned by Louis XVI.

Lord Ronald Gower (1845-1916) visited Mentmore the late 1870s and described the room in his journal:

In November I visited the gorgeous abode of Baron Meyer [sic] [...] Entering it as we did, on the close of a winter's day, the effect of this great hall brilliantly lighted was enchanting. Its form reminds me of Bridgewater House, but the walls, instead of being of scagliola and plaster, here are hung thickly round with superb old Flemish tapestries. A great door of glass faces the corridor through which the hall is entered, it is one sheet of glass, twenty feet high by ten wide. In this hall are three of these crystal doors.⁷²

Gower continued his description, noting some of the most impressive objects kept in the room:

Huge gilt chairs with purple velvet cushions (once in the palace of the Doges at Venice) surround all this wealth of marble and magnificence, whilst scattered on every side are clocks, marbles, bronzes, busts, rare dishes, precious toys, and trinkets, to which even Disraeli's pen, who is one of the guests, could barely do justice.⁷³

⁷¹ Benjamin Disraeli, *Letters to Frances Anne Marchioness of Londonderry 1837-1861* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 159.

⁷² Gower, *My Reminiscences*, p. 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

Green Drawing Room and White Drawing Room

The Green and White Drawing Rooms departed from the Italian Renaissance style of the Entrance Hall and Grand Hall and were presented in the French Rococo manner. These rooms were designed as settings for the works of art they housed. The walls of both rooms were lined with ornate silk, both had Rococo elements in their ceilings and curtains, and both contained French eighteenth-century chimneypieces. The style may also have been adopted as it was one which afforded femininity and elegance.

Green Drawing Room

When Lady Margaret Crewe-Milnes, Marchioness of Crewe (a granddaughter of Mayer), published her memoirs in *The Times* she remarked that the room to the east of the South Entrance was known as the Green Drawing Room because the walls were lined with green silk or satin.⁷⁴ The general style adopted for the Green Drawing Room was that of the Louis XIV or Regence manner, yet it was understated. The French Rococo style was more muted, and combined with the Italian Renaissance: such a scheme was perhaps created in order that this room could be used by male members of the family and their guests, whilst the White Drawing Room was reserved for the ladies.



Figure 88: Green Drawing Room from west, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

⁷⁴ Margaret Crewe-Milnes, Marchioness of Crewe, 'Memories of the grand life in the vast treasure chest of Mentmore', *The Times*, 26 February 1977, p. 12. This was reportedly a room favoured by Mayer's wife, Juliana, even though it has three doors and it was known she disliked draughts: Bidwell, *Mentmore Towers*, p. 9.



Figure 89: Green Drawing Room from north-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Seven works by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian artists were displayed in this room (three by Titian, two by Carlo Dolci and singular works by Allori Bronzino and Giovanni Battista Moroni).⁷⁵ The majority of these had been purchased together from the Manfrin Gallery, Venice, sometime before 1860 and Mayer evidently wished to show them all together in his mansion. These works were by no means confirmed as genuine, and therefore an unusual Rothschild choice. It is possible that this was an experiment at Mentmore House encouraged by Barker: indeed Barker's own collection as seen by Gustav Waagen (1797-1868) in 1857 contained some notable Italian works. Barker had acquired these works for Mayer directly from the Manfrin Gallery and aided him in re-framing them.⁷⁶ The portraits may have been an attempt by Mayer to complement the Italianate decorative style created in many of the other rooms at Mentmore (such as the Entrance Hall and Grand Hall).

⁷⁵ The most important of these works had been purchased from the Manfrin Collection, Venice, in 1857 by Mayer de Rothschild's agent Alexander Barker.

⁷⁶ Dalmeny House Archive, Receipt from Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild for £5200 for four pictures from the Manfrin Palace, Venice, 1860, in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Green Drawing Room, 10, 11, 12, 13.



Figure 90: Titian, *Caterina Cornaro* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols
[Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 91: Carlo Dolci, *Magdalen* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols
[Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 92: Carlo Dolci, *St Cecilia* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 93: Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Portrait of a Scholar* (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume IV Paintings, Prints and Drawings* [London: Sotheby's, Parke, Bernet & Co., 1977])

In contrast to his brother Lionel and to his nephews there were only a handful of English works in Mayer's possession: he did not follow their enthusiasm for English portraits. Evidence does not survive to confirm how many English works Mayer purchased in his

lifetime but he certainly did not own any large eighteenth-century portraits by artists such as Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds or George Romney such as his brother Lionel had begun to collect in the 1860s and 70s. It is however probable that the portraits of *Baron Mayer de Rothschild* by George F. Watts and *Baroness Mayer de Rothschild* by Frederick Leighton that hung in the Green Drawing Room in 1883 were commissioned by him in the early 1870s.⁷⁷ These works were an unusual purchase by a Rothschild family member as they generally avoided contemporary art. These works can be explained however if they are seen as commemorative and celebratory portraits of Mentmore's founder and his wife. These artists were the most esteemed of the time: this reveals that, when Mayer did wish to have himself and his wife painted, he hired the best artists to do it.



Figure 94: Thomas Gainsborough, *Greyhounds Coursing a Fox*

⁷⁷ Mayer also owned the work *Greyhounds Coursing a Fox* by Thomas Gainsborough, and it hung on the Grand Staircase. Another work at Mentmore, *A Group of Mounted Huntsmen* by Edwin Cooper, probably depicted Mayer and his two brothers. There were also a number of portraits of racing horses by English artists. That these works, a particular class of English school paintings, were shown at Mentmore, can be explained by Mayer's admiration for hunting and for horseracing. He also inherited the family piece by Edwin D. Smith showing Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1836), his wife Hannah (1783-1850) and their seven children.



Figure 95: Edwin Cooper, *A Group of Mounted Huntsmen* (probably Mayer de Rothschild and his two brothers)

The room was also furnished with a good number of Italian sixteenth- and seventeenth-century bronzes, sculptures and ivories as well as ornate furniture of the same period. Such objects complemented the Italian paintings. The presence of one large Italian cabinet with silver gilt reliefs may be explained by its supposed association with Marie de Medici and therefore Mayer's interest in the historical.⁷⁸ As in the Grand Hall the room also however featured a large and ornate French eighteenth century carpet, along with limited items of French eighteenth-century furniture. These items were perhaps chosen to complement the French marble chimneypiece and elegant moulded doors of the room.

⁷⁸ It was acquired by Mayer de Rothschild in 1855 from Barker for £1000 and it is possible he accepted the royal provenance at the time, it is now considered to be of mid-seventeenth century in date: receipt from Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild, 1855 in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Green Drawing Room, Furniture, no. 2. Swynfen Jervis, 'Treasure House Furniture', in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Binney and Andrae, pp. 13-14: Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum collections, accession number W.64:1 to 3-1977.



Figure 96: Franco-Flemish ebony and gilt bronze cabinet in first floor Gallery (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 97: Bacchus, Flemish, seventeenth-century (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

White Drawing Room

The French Rococo style of the White Drawing Room was more striking, with its ornate Rococo ceiling, white and gold chimneypiece, gilt doors with panel paintings (which had been painted by Jean-Honoré Fragonard and taken from a French château), French eighteenth-century carpet (made for Louis XV to present to Grand Treasurer of Poland) and curtains of the same period (allegedly embroidered by Marie Antoinette and her

ladies). This room at the north side of the mansion led from the lavish Rococo style Dining Room and there may have been a wish to continue this scheme into it. An outstanding German eighteenth-century marquetry bureau with its extravagant Rococo decoration further enhanced the opulence of the room, its associations with the King of Poland probably making it highly desirable to Mayer.



Figure 98: White Drawing Room, ceiling, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 99: White Drawing Room, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

Evidence as to the appearance of this room in the nineteenth century again comes from Lord Ronald Gower (1845-1916) who wrote:

Paintings by the French masters of the last century abound, and the school of Watteau, Pater, and Greuze is evidently the favourite with the owner. One room is full of Bouchers and Watteaus.⁷⁹

This room 'full of Bouchers and Watteaus' was presumably the White Drawing Room. Five paintings featuring sentimental or pastoral scenes by François Boucher were hung in this room, emphasising the feminine scheme.⁸⁰ In contrast to the rather small amount of English works to be found in his possession at Mentmore House, Mayer's French eighteenth-century pictures were numerous. They had mostly been purchased in Paris in the 1850s and 60s. Mayer's interest in the works is highly noteworthy: he was buying these paintings at a time when no other member of his family was. Whilst this was not as pioneering a date as for some Englishmen, it was still somewhat early for Mayer to acquire so many works of this type (they made up more than half of his collection). They were likely to have been purchased after the mansion was completed and complemented the French Rococo-revival interior decoration chosen for several rooms of the mansion. They also corresponded with Mayer's existing tastes for eighteenth-century French decorative art and furniture. French works at Mentmore extended to a vast number of miniatures, a considerable number of which were displayed in this room. A high proportion of these featured portraits of the French royal family and aristocracy of the eighteenth century, again revealing Mayer's keen interest in these subjects. Mayer's brother-in-law the Hon. Henry Fitzroy wrote advising him to purchase a collection of around 400 miniatures he had viewed in Paris, suggesting in a letter that 'such a chance I do not think you can ever have again and for your place they are worth anything'.⁸¹ We might speculate that these miniatures ended up in the White Drawing Room and Blarenberghe Room at Mentmore as they contained a considerable number of such objects of the eighteenth-century. The White Drawing Room especially contained many examples of Sèvres porcelain, and miniatures from the Louis XV and XVI period. Many of the items were purchased by Mayer from the dealers Barker and Louis-Auguste Beuderley in the 1850s. Examples included

⁷⁹ Gower, *My Reminiscences*, p. 7.

⁸⁰ *Girl Lying Asleep with Youth Holding Flowers, Youth and Child Seated on Grass with a Dog, Diana Asleep with a Dog, Fishing Scene, Pastoral Scene.*

⁸¹ Quoted in Hall, 'The Rothschild Collection at Mentmore', introduction.

two Royal Blue vases and covers with designs by Boucher of Venus, Cupids and floral designs; a 'soup basin, cover and stand' of Rose du Barry with gold-bordered medallions painted with landscapes, dated 1753; a Royal Blue soup-basin with cover and tray decorated with medallions of bird and landscapes by the artist Alouche dated 1777; a similar Royal Blue soup-basin with cover and tray with medallions by the artist Merault dated 1786.⁸²



Figure 100: François Boucher, *Youth and Child Seated on Grass with a Dog* and *Diana Asleep with a Dog* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

⁸² Receipt from Louis-Auguste Beurdeley to Mayer de Rothschild, 1864 in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), White Drawing Room, Sèvres China, nos 3 and 4; Receipts from Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild, 1851-3 in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), White Drawing Room, Sèvres China, nos 12, 13, 14, 41, 43, 44.



Figure 101: François Boucher, *Fishing Scene* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 102: François Boucher, *Pastoral Scene* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

French eighteenth-century furniture and a large quantity of Sèvres porcelain further emphasised the French Rococo nature of the room (in fact there were over 50 Sèvres objects on display here alone). The volume of miniatures and Sèvres created an extravagant display. This interest in French eighteenth-century objects had been shown by the Rothschild family for many decades and this inherited preference may have

encouraged Mayer's interest in collecting these objects both before and after Mentmore's construction. In addition the choice of such decorative and yet elegant items may have been intended to show Mayer's ability as a collector of luxury works of art (and those with fashionable historical associations), and furthermore emphasise the sumptuousness of his mansion. It also probably reflected his wish to create a decidedly feminine and decorative room, filled with the finest pieces of French art.



Figure 103: Sèvres porcelain and ormolu mantel clock (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* [1977])

Dining Room



Figure 104: Dining Room from north-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 105: Dining Room east wall, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 106: Dining Room door in south east corner, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

The French Rococo theme of the White Drawing Room was taken to further extremes in the Dining Room. Its authentic eighteenth-century *boiseries* (considered as ‘amongst the first example of this type of decoration to be adopted for use in an English house’), ceiling and chimneypiece had come directly from the Paris *hôtel de Villars* in 1850, acquired for Mayer by Barker from the Stowe sale of 1848.⁸³ These fittings had been designed for the *Gallerie* at the *hôtel de Villars* by the architect Jean-Baptiste Leroux and executed by

⁸³ Harris, *Moving Rooms*, p. 59.

Nicolas Pineau in 1731-3.⁸⁴ The doors for the room were equally fine, imitating Louis XIV's *grand appartement* at Versailles.⁸⁵ Sculptural gilt tables and white marble candelabra figures complemented the white and gold of the panelling, which was deliberately reflected in substantial mirrors at either end of the room. One particularly large mirror hung above an elaborate chimneypiece: according to Clarke Andreae this was also from the *Gallerie* of the *hôtel de Villars* as 'its design and embellishment corresponded exactly'.⁸⁶ Finally Boucher-style paintings by Charles-André van Loo had also been acquired from the Stowe sale hung above each door. That these objects were acquired before Mentmore was begun again reveals the extent to which Mayer's existing collections, as well as what was most readily available on the market, dictated the mansion's style. It is important to note that Mayer had acquired these objects directly from his dealer, Barker, once more revealing his influence upon the decorative schemes for Mayer's mansion. These features and fittings enabled Mayer to create a decorative scheme which was highly ornamental and truly sumptuous. The room was the location of lavish entertainment, and so Mayer would have felt the need to create a luxurious statement, in fashionable taste.⁸⁷ The use of authentic objects, from locations formerly belonging to *Ancien Régime* aristocrats, also perhaps conferred a certain status upon Mentmore and its owner.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Pons, *The James A. de Rothschild Bequest at Waddesdon Manor*, pp. 384-49.

⁸⁶ Andreae, 'A French/English Dialogue in Architecture and Interior Decoration from the Mid-Eighteenth Century until the Years between the Great Wars', p. 320.

⁸⁷ Bidwell, *Mentmore Towers*, p. 9.



Figure 107: *Hôtel de Villars* (Paul Lacroix, *The Eighteenth Century, its Institutions, Customs and Costumes. France 1700-1789* [London: Chapman and Hall, 1876])

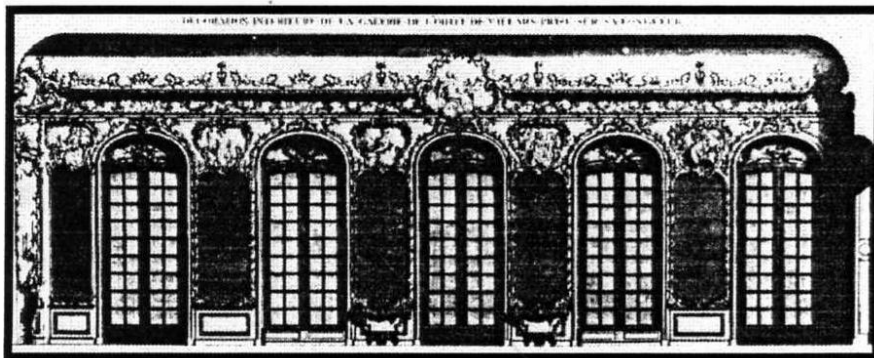


Figure 108: Jean-Baptiste Leroux and Nicolas Pineau, *hôtel de Villars, Galerie*, longitudinal section (Waddesdon Manor Archive)

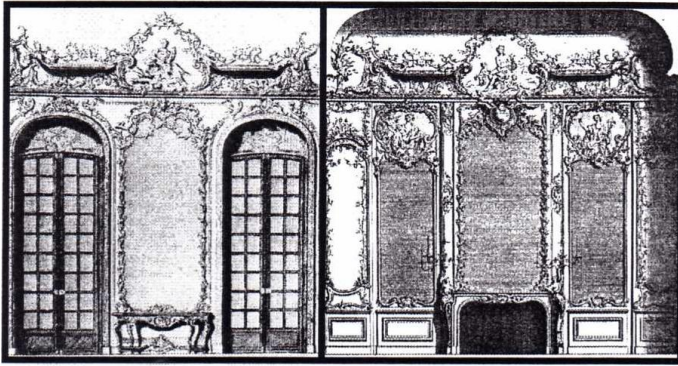


Figure 109: Jean-Baptiste Leroux and Nicolas Pineau, *hôtel de Villars, Galerie*, transverse with trumeau and console table (Wend von Kalnein, *Architecture in France in the Eighteenth Century* [Yale University Press: New Haven, 1995], p.121, fig. 138)

Limoges Room and Amber Room

These two rooms of Mentmore House have been described as Mayer's *Wunderkammern*. They further reveal his interest in decorative and precious ornamental objects. As discussed, such a taste may have owed to the influence of his family and early experiences of travel, as well as his evident interest in items associated with or depicting royal or aristocratic individuals. The display cabinets of the Limoges Room for example contained hundreds of fifteenth-, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century enamel plates and tazze and sixteenth-century German and Italian silver objects. The Limoges enamels upon the walls depicted members of the French royalty and aristocracy.⁸⁸ It is probable that the room was one of Mayer's favoured parts of his mansion: his granddaughter, Margaret Crewe-Milnes, Marchioness of Crewe, noted that curiously when Mayer returned from hunting he would 'have a bath in the Limoges Room – a singular place to choose.'⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Dalmeny House Archive, Receipt from H. Beuderley and E. Falcke to Mayer de Rothschild, in Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883), Limoges Room, Limoges Enamels.

⁸⁹ Margaret Crewe-Milnes, Marchioness of Crewe, 'Memories of the grand life in the vast treasure chest of Mentmore', *The Times*, 26 February 1977, p. 12.



Figure 110: Ground floor Limoges Room from west, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 111: Limoges Enamel: *Duchesse de Nevers* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])⁹⁰

⁹⁰ According to the 1883 catalogue the portrait of the *Duchesse de Nevers* had 'come from a mantelpiece in the Château de Chenonceaux' and was acquired through the dealer H. Beuderley in 1863 for 1700 francs, along with a portrait of *Henri II*, possibly by Leonard Limousin, enameller to King Henri II.



Figure 112: Limoges Enamel: *Henri II* by Leonard Limousin (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

The Amber Room also contained numerous cabinets full with hundreds of Italian rock crystal objects, German silver objects and items of agate, jade and ivory. The location of these rooms (at the extreme north-east of the mansion leading from the Library) as well as their small size, further supports the idea Mayer had intended them as his *Schatzkammer* chambers. The tendency to create such rooms and collections was common to many members of his family, and indeed a popular nineteenth-century interest, such objects being readily available to purchase at this time.



Figure 113: Amber Room south wall, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 114: A pair of Italian mid-sixteenth-century vases of agate (18 and 19); Italian early-seventeenth-century vase and cover of agate (20); German early-seventeenth-century tazza of agate (22); pair of German early-seventeenth-century blackamores upon crystal columns (26 and 27) (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

Other rooms

Remaining rooms (including the Du Barry Room, Blarenberghe Room, Library and Billiard Room) continued the French Rococo-revival theme which had begun in the drawing rooms. A sense of luxury and ornament was created throughout by the choice of features, fittings, decorative objects and furniture.



Figure 115: First floor Gallery south and east side, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 116: A set of 17 Italian giltwood armchairs, first floor Gallery, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

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⁹¹ These chairs dated to c.1850 but the silk embroidery (featuring vases of flowers on a white silk ground) was of a much earlier date (c.1720) each had its own dust cover in stamped hide.



Figure 117: Ormolu-mounted parquetry writing cabinet attributed to Jean-François Leleu (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* [London: Sotheby, Parke, Bernet & Co., 1977])



Figure 118: Boulle bureau plat (with a leather top decorated with crossed L's and the Royal Arms) (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* [1977])⁹²

The historical interest of the Du Barry Room is obvious when we consider the room took its title from a marble sculpture (date unknown) of Madame du Barry, last official mistress to Louis XV. The major decorative features and fittings were either original or imitation French Rococo items (for example the chimneypiece, ornate plaster ceiling and decorative satin of the walls and curtains). French eighteenth-century furniture, Sèvres and Dresden china abounded.

⁹² This was supplied by Barker in 1853 for £85: receipt from Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild, 1855 in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Library Furniture, no. 71.



Figure 119: Du Barry Room from south-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

The Billiard Room further emphasised Mayer's preference for French eighteenth-century paintings, or perhaps his awareness that these works would complement the French Rococo decorative schemes he created. Works by François-Hubert Drouais, Boucher, van Loo, and other French artists were hung in this room, most of them purchased in the 1860s. They were all portraits, furthermore they were portraits of famous French figures (for example Madame de Pompadour; Voltaire and Madame Châtelet; Vauban; Abel Francois Poisson, the Marquis de Marigny; Louis XV; and Madame de Montespan).⁹³ This further reveals Mayer's interest in objects with historical associations. French eighteenth-century furniture by some of the most desirable eighteenth-century craftsmen, more than 20 items of Sèvres (including numerous white biscuit figures of Marie Antoinette) and numerous ornate French clocks completed the look.

⁹³ On the occasion of the sale of the portrait of *Madame de Pompadour* Falcke wrote to Mayer commenting on the popularity of the work: 'Congratulations on winning this picture. All the world was present – including your brother Sir Anthony. The most beautiful picture I have ever seen, it will be a proud acquisition to Mentmore': Letter from E. Flacke to Mayer de Rothschild in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Billiard Room, Pictures, no. 20.

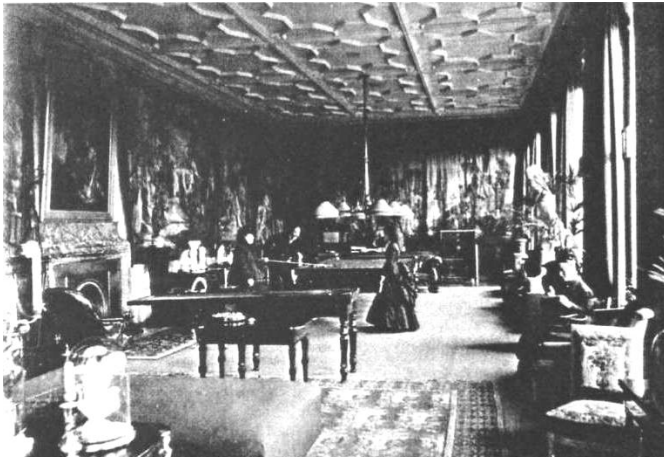


Figure 120: The Billiard Room at Mentmore in the 1870s (Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan*)



Figure 121: Francois-Hubert Drouais, *Madame Pompadour*



Figure 122: Louis-Nicholas van Blarenberghe, *The Champs-Elysee*,



Figure 123: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Fête Champêtre* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 124: Jean Petitot, *Louis XIV* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 125: Jean Petitot, *Marie Theresa, Queen of Louis XIV* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 126: Louis XIV tête de poupée quarter-striking ormolu-mounted Boulle bracket clock (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* [1977])⁹⁴



Figure 127: Fine ormolu mantel clock (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* [1977])

⁹⁴ This clock was purchased in 1853 for £80 and is thought to be the work of Jacques-Augustin Thuret, clockmaker to Louis XIV: in 1884 it was kept in the Library: *Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* (1977), p. 87.

A similar effect was created in the Blarenberghe Room with French eighteenth-century furniture, items of Sèvres porcelain, and curtains supposedly embroidered by Marie Antoinette. In a similar manner to the White Drawing Room, this room contained hundreds of miniatures, a high proportion of which featured portraits of the French royal family and aristocracy of the eighteenth century, once more revealing Mayer's fascination with such individuals and the *Ancien Régime*. The room further supported Mayer's interest in French eighteenth-century paintings: it contained over 25 works by the family of van Blarenberghe acquired from the 1860s onwards in Venice.⁹⁵ Three works by Fragonard also hung here.⁹⁶



Figure 128: Blarenberghe Room east wall, RCHM 1975, (NMRC)

⁹⁵ These included titles such as *Cavalry in Close Combat*, *Cavalry Battle and Encampment*, *The Champs-Elysees*, *A Military Encampment*, *Battle of Laufeldt*, *Group of Men on Horseback*, *Spring/Summer/Autumn/Winter Scene*, *River Scene*, *Ruin with Bridge*, *Sea View*, and *Meet of the Royal Hounds at Fontainebleu*: Several of these Blarenberghe works were supplied by the dealer Thomas Hancock and Edward Falcke in the 1850s and 1860s: Receipts from Thomas Hancock and E. Falcke to Mayer de Rothschild in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Blarenberghe Room, Gouche Paintings.

⁹⁶ *Female Figure in Court Costume*, *The Child's First Drive* and *The First Walk* (the two latter works purchased from Falcke in 1868 for £500): Receipt from E. Falcke to Mayer de Rothschild, in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883), Boudoir, Pictures, nos 84, 93.



Figure 129: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Child's First Drive* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 130: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The First Walk* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

The rooms of the first floor of Mentmore House were presented in similar luxurious fashion to the ground floor: all generally followed the French Rococo style and were furnished with French and German furniture. Most were provided with Louis XV or Louis XVI marble chimneypieces and other decorative architectural fittings. A room on this floor named the Boudoir demonstrated the style most extravagantly with a French eighteenth-century decorative ceiling, ornamental chimneypiece and door and furniture of the same period. Over 30 Sèvres objects and around 10 pastoral or sentimental works by French artists such as Louise Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, Jean-Baptiste Pater, Fragonard and Boucher

created a highly decorative and feminine interior. Two Sèvres milk pails once belonging to Marie Antoinette (made for her dairy at Rambouille), purchased in the 1830s further reveals Mayer's interest in objects linked to the French royal family and particularly Marie Antoinette.⁹⁷



Figure 131: First floor Gilt Bedroom from south-east, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 132: First floor French Bedroom from south-west, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)

⁹⁷ Bought by Mayer in the 1830s from the sale of the collection of the Duchess of Bedford: Sir Francis Watson, 'Mentmore and its Art Collections', in *Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* (1977), introduction.



Figure 133: First floor Austrian Bedroom, RCHM 1975 (NMRC)



Figure 134: Sèvres porcelain milk pail (one of a pair), made for Marie Antoinette
(*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume III Porcelain* [London: Sotheby, Parke, Bernet & Co., 18-27 May 1977], vol III, lot 2079)

Interiors and collections: conclusion

Overall the styles chosen by Mayer for the interiors of Mentmore House were eclectic, being variously Italian Renaissance, classical and French Rococo. There was however a common sense of luxury, of grandeur and of ostentation. Most of the paintings which Mayer collected were of high quality, and often appealed to his interest in historical

figures.⁹⁸ Mayer's collecting in this area differed from his brothers Lionel and Anthony, who owned many more Dutch and Flemish paintings and considerably less French eighteenth-century and Italian sixteenth-century works than their brother.

There were only very few Dutch and Flemish works in Mayer's possession on display at Mentmore House.⁹⁹ They included a pair of ovals by Ferdinand Bol, *Landscapes with Hunting Scenes*; a work by Rembrandt entitled *Burgomaster*; a *Portrait of a Gentleman* by Bernard van Orley; and the Abraham Teniers work *Soldiers Plundering a Village*.¹⁰⁰ Mayer also owned some German works; these included works by Lucas Cranach the Younger, a work by Johann Wilhelm Baur, and more unusually because of its eighteenth-century date, a work by Johann Zoffany.¹⁰¹ The selection however was small and limited in comparison to the collection built up by Mayer's brother Lionel.

⁹⁸ John Martin Robinson, 'Paintings Above Price', in *Save Mentmore for the Nation*, ed. by Marcus Binney and Sophie Andrae (Save Britain's Heritage, 1977), pp. 5-8.

⁹⁹ Probably purchased in the 1850s and 60s.

¹⁰⁰ The Bol works were purchased in 1852: Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883); the Rembrandt work was purchased from the Manfrin collection in 1857 by Alexander Barker and sold to Mayer before 1860: Receipt from Alexander Barker to Mayer de Rothschild in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883); the van Orley work was purchased from the collection of Lord Northwick in 1859 via M. H. Colnaghi: Receipt from M. H. Colnaghi to Mayer de Rothschild in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1883).

¹⁰¹ The Cranach, a portrait of *Frederick the Wise* was purchased from the collection of Lord Northwick in 1859 via the dealer M. H. Colnaghi; the Baur work, *An Imaginary Seaport with Christ shown to the People* was bought by Mayer de Rothschild in 1855 from Thomas Hancock of Bond Street; the Zoffany work *Plundering of the King's Cellar* was purchased from an anonymous sale, in London on 30 November 1867.



Figure 135: Ferdinand Bol, *Landscapes with Hunting Scenes* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 136: Rembrandt, *Burgomaster* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 137: Bernard van Orley, *Portrait of a Gentleman* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 138: Abraham Teniers, *Soldiers Plundering a Village* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])



Figure 139: Lucas Cranach the Younger, *Frederick the Wise* (NAL, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore*, 2 vols [Privately printed by R & R Clark, 1884])

The French and Italian works which Mayer favoured emphasised the gilded and decorative Renaissance and Rococo schemes of Mentmore's interiors. The furniture provided for Mentmore by Mayer was on the whole French (most strong in eighteenth-century pieces) or Italian (Italian baroque being the most conspicuous), and thus also in keeping with the general opulent yet elegant schemes of decoration.¹⁰² Mayer's primary collecting interest lay in precious objects, usually German, but variously English and Italian; he was also attracted to French eighteenth-century decorative objects.

¹⁰² Little information survives concerning the provenance of the furniture and many conclusions are based on information given in Hannah's 1883 catalogue.



Figure 140: Kingwood and marquetry bureau cabinet, German, made for Augustus III, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, seen in the White Drawing Room c.1870 (RAL, 000/924/21 Album of photographs compiled by Charlotte de Rothschild, no date [c.1870s])

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Figure 141: German (Augsburg) ormolu-mounted desk (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Mentmore: Volume I Furniture* [1977])

¹⁰³ Made in the 1750s for Augustus III, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony. It was acquired in 1835 by Mayer for £1,000 from the dealer Sigismundis Borke of 103 Piccadilly, London. Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum collections, accession number W.63-1977; Receipt from Sigismundis Borke to Mayer de Rothschild in Dalmeny House Archive, Hannah, Lady Rosebery, *Mentmore* (Privately printed, 1883), Lord Rosebery's Sitting Room, Furniture, no. 1.

Upon its completion Mayer sought to fill his new mansion at Mentmore in earnest with considerable quantities of *objets d'art*. Almost every room was used to house some part of his vast collection of objects. A contemporary journal of 1879 praised the collections

[T]here are articles of *vertu* each worth the value of 100 acres of good grass land in the adjoining vale. There are rich and rare cabinets with majolica, and amber ornaments of fabulous preciousness, a room full, but not too full, of exquisite engravings, another room without even a nail in the wall to hide the rich pattern of hand-woven silk.¹⁰⁴

Another publication of the time reported that '[f]ew if any of the mansions of Great Britain can boast a collection of household art equalling that of Mentmore', and added that the house was so full of precious objects and furniture that the 'most celebrated of Messrs. Christie's famous catalogues can hardly furnish such a list.'¹⁰⁵

This combination of the great Elizabethan-style exterior for the house, the French and classical-style interior decoration and the presence of large amounts of continental furniture and works of art may seem surprising. The reasons why Mayer may have decided on such an arrangement are varied. Firstly it is clear Mayer liked to collect, and to collect decorative objects: he prized and could afford the rich and rare. Furthermore it was these objects which were most plentiful and accessible at the time Mayer began collecting. The association of many of the objects at Mentmore with famous past figures furthermore reveals Mayer's interest in the historical and the curious. The influence of his brothers, as well as the wider continental Rothschild family, in encouraging Mayer to develop a Francophile taste and a predilection for German *Schatzkammer* objects is also important. Furthermore most of the objects Mayer purchased were valuable and good investments; this must have been a consideration in his choices. Finally documentary sources also reveal Mayer's reliance on dealers in his purchases, in particular Alexander Barker.

In addition to these personal and present reasons however, the objects Mayer collected, and the interiors he created may also have been intended to serve a more conceptual purpose. Mayer created interiors and collections which projected a particular image of his

¹⁰⁴ H. E., 'Mentmore Towers', *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, 14 June 1879, 748-749.

¹⁰⁵ *The Cabinet Maker*, X, 1890.

residence and a certain impact: one of luxury, of wealth, and of status. The choice of the Renaissance and French Rococo styles may have been an attempt to match the exterior of his mansion in grandeur. Whereas some other Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury would be more intimate, Mentmore was luxurious and grand and its collections were 'considerable both in quantity and variety'.¹⁰⁶ Mentmore was a location for grand country entertaining, and the interiors created here matched this function, important both for success in business and for social advancement. Mayer's residence overtly displayed to his peers that he possessed the wealth, taste and connections to produce opulent and fashionable interiors.

Much of the interior decoration of Mentmore House was executed in the 1850s and 60.¹⁰⁷ The house was therefore an early exercise in eclectic Rothschild taste which would influence and help shape certain aspects of later Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury: it was to be an important influence on the direction of Rothschild taste as it itself became ever more opulent. Joseph Alsop believes Mentmore 'really opened the more characteristic chapters of the Rothschild collecting saga'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed the collections and interiors of Halton House and Waddesdon Manor built later in the nineteenth century compared favorably to those of Mentmore where the combination of marble, mirrors, *boiseries* and tapestries was pioneered in an English Rothschild country residence. These aspects continued to be employed in later Rothschild houses in the Vale and sometimes became more abundant.

Contemporary reception

Mayer's efforts in constructing a grand English mansion, the first to be owned by the Rothschild family in the area, were deemed a success by contemporaries. *The Builder* in 1857 praised it as 'a grouping of a picturesque character and outline' and observed that it had been 'executed in a most excellent and substantial manner'.¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth, Lady

¹⁰⁶ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 361.

¹⁰⁷ Although it must be noted that Mayer Rothschild's daughter, Hannah Primrose, Countess of Rosebery, and her husband Archibald Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery continued to add to the collections and alter the presentation of the rooms at Mentmore when they inherited the mansion in 1874.

¹⁰⁸ Alsop, *The Rare Art Traditions*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹ 'Mentmore', *The Builder*, XV (Dec 19 1857), 738-40.

Eastlake, who had visited every fashionable country house of the time, came to Mentmore in 1872. She was evidently enchanted with the magnificence of the presentation:

It was like fairyland when I entered the great palace, and got at once into the grand hall...hung with tapestries, floored with parquet and Persian carpets: an open arcade above runs round and looks down through arches into the hall, which is filled with gorgeous masses of flowers and every sumptuous objects that wealth can command.¹¹⁰

In 1879 *The Gardener's Chronicle* judged Mentmore to be 'a most magnificent house'.¹¹¹ The house remained famous and popular for many centuries to come: indeed still by 1882 the *Journal of Horticulture and Country Gentlemen* expressed a common opinion:

This is one of the most magnificent houses of the great that adorn our land – at once an embodiment of wealth and stability, and typically characteristic of this sea-girt isle.¹¹²

The *Illustrated London News* similarly remarked in 1894 that Mentmore was 'a structure having beauty rivalling its size, a strikingly fine example of Anglo-Italian architecture'.¹¹³ The 1st Marquess of Crewe, called it an 'amazing creation'.

Indeed no account survives which has provided a less than favourable report of the house and contents. It seems the mansion was a successful pioneer in the Vale of Aylesbury, aiding the family's acceptance, gaining them publicity and expressing their status.

¹¹⁰ *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, ed. by Charles Eastlake Smith, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1895), II, p. 224.

¹¹¹ H. E., 'Mentmore Towers', *The Gardener's Chronicle*, 21 June 1879.

¹¹² J. Wright, *Journal of Horticulture, Cottage Gardener and Country Gentlemen*, 23 (1882), 478.

¹¹³ 'The Premier's Country Seats', *The Illustrated London News*, 24 March 1894.



Figure 142: Sir Francis Grant, *A Meet of the Rothschild Hunt at Mentmore Towers* (with Mayer's daughter, Hannah de Rothschild, in a carriage in the foreground), c.1855

Chapter Nine

Aston Clinton House

Aston Clinton House was the second large house to be inhabited by the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury in the nineteenth century. This chapter will show that the Rothschild family's purchase of the Aston Clinton estate and acquisition of this second country house owed to their wish to reside near one another in the Vale of Aylesbury and to invest in contiguous estates. This chapter will also make clear that the purchase and renovation of the residence was motivated by the wish of Anthony de Rothschild (1810-1876) to regularly escape London with his family and pursue a country life for part of the year. That the architectural style chosen for the renovation and expansion of Aston Clinton House reflected these intentions, and Anthony's wish to create a comfortable house without a large financial investment, will also be argued. Anthony undertook significant and expensive alterations both to the interior and exterior of Aston Clinton House in order to enlarge and modernise the existing structure. It will be shown here that Anthony retained much of the original interior decorative styles of the original mansion; it will also show however that he introduced new French Rococo schemes into several major reception rooms and filled his mansion with furniture and *objets d'art* of continental manufacture and style.

Aston Clinton, 1086-1848

Before its purchase by the Rothschild family in 1849 Aston Clinton was already a thriving estate, and boasted an existing manor house. The village of Aston Clinton, four miles east of Aylesbury and seven miles south of Mentmore, was recorded in the Domesday Book when it was referred to as *Estone* or 'eastern estate'.¹ Little is known about the estate in the following centuries, apart from its owners which included Edward de Salisbury (High Sheriff of Wiltshire), Sir William de Farendon, the de Clinton family (from whom it then took its name) and the Montacute family (ancestors of the Earls of Salisbury). After 1760 when it was purchased by Gerard Lake (1744-1808) much more is known. Lake had served for a considerable time in the army, in America, Ireland and India, reaching the rank of

¹ 'The Parishes of Aylesbury Hundred: Aston Clinton' in *The Victoria History of the County of Buckingham*, ed. by William Page (London: Archibald Constable, St Catherine Press, 1908), II, pp. 312-319.

lieutenant general by 1797. He also pursued a political career and was elected as MP for Aylesbury in 1790 and 1796. Lake was made a Baron in 1804 and a Viscount in 1807, when he took the title 1st Viscount of Delhi, Leswarree and Aston Clinton.²

When Lake acquired the Aston Clinton estate a manor house already existed on it, situated next to the twelfth century parish church.³ Lake replaced this with a new larger manor house built close to what later became the site of the Grand Junction Canal.⁴ It is not known exactly when this new house was constructed, yet a map of 1793 (a proposal for a new canal) shows a house on the new site marked as 'seat of General Lake'.⁵ It is likely therefore the new house was built sometime between 1770 and 1793. This structure would later form part of the Rothschilds' residence.

The Aston Clinton estate was inherited by Lake's son Francis (1772-1836) and afterwards Francis's brother, Warwick Lake (1783-1848). For reasons unknown Warwick sold the 1,055 acres estate and all its contents in 1838 for £23,426.⁶ The purchaser was the 1st Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, who owned several surrounding estates. At the time of sale the estate of 1,055 acres was estimated to bring an income of £1,000 per annum and was considered as a reasonable investment. The sale catalogue of 1836 described the estate as a 'shooting box' which boasted 'extensive plantations, pleasure grounds and a park, with shaded walks and fish pond adjoining a timbered park'. At this time the manor house contained four primary bedrooms and five secondary and servants' bedrooms. There was a 'cheerful' drawing room with a bow window and a dining room on the ground floor. Additional servants' rooms lay near an enclosed yard with wash-house and laundry, and there was a double coach house, stables and loose box. Also situated on the wider estate were the old manor house, a blacksmith's shop, a forge and a carpenter's shop, as well as several farms.⁷

² Ibid.

³ This house would later become known as Church Farm.

⁴ Diana Gulland, 'Aston Clinton House, Buckinghamshire', *The Rothschild Archive Review of the Year* (2002/2003), 32-37.

⁵ CBS, P/U/A9/2. Plan to make navigable the proposed cut or feeder from Wendover to the summit level of the Grand Junction Canal at Bulbourne, c.1793-4.

⁶ LMA, ACC/262/62/1-2, Minute books of the Proceedings of the Trustees of the Duke of Buckingham, 1836-1839; 'Aston Clinton between Tring and Aylesbury, Bucks', *Bucks Chronicle*, 22 October 1836, no.1268.

⁷ RAL, H&J, S.62, Particulars of sale of Aston Clinton, 27 September 1836.

The estate was inherited by the 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. There is some debate over whether the manor house which Lake had built in the late-eighteenth century had been rebuilt by the 2nd Duke of Buckingham. Certainly Kelly's directory of 1854 suggests as much.⁸ Yet Diana Gulland and John Chenevix Trench believe the 2nd Duke of Buckingham probably simply renovated and repaired the existing house and perhaps made some changes to the layout of the rooms.⁹ Gulland points towards evidence from Constance, Lady Battersea (née Rothschild 1843-1931), who later wrote that her father had been fortunate to find a small country house in Aston Clinton, 'formerly the home of the Lake family', into which they moved in 1853.¹⁰ Gulland concludes that 'Constance is unlikely to have referred to the house as the Lakes' former home if it had been a completely new house built by the Duke of Buckingham'.¹¹ The only substantial addition seems to have been a new portico entrance.¹²

⁸ *Kelly's Directory of Buckinghamshire* (London: Kelly's, 1854).

⁹ Gulland is an archivist for the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society and Trench is a member of the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies. Both state that no evidence to support this case has been found: Diana Gulland, 'Aston Clinton Manor House: from moated site to classical mansion', *Records of Buckinghamshire*, 43 (2003), 196-207.

¹⁰ Constance Battersea, *Lady de Rothschild: extracts from her notebooks* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1912), p.10 and p.24.

¹¹ Gulland, 'Aston Clinton Manor House: from moated site to classical mansion', 196-207.

¹² See CBS, Church Farm (south of church) and the new mansion house (north of canal), an extract from the Enclosure Commissioners Working Map 1814, surveyed by John King of Winslow, 1814.

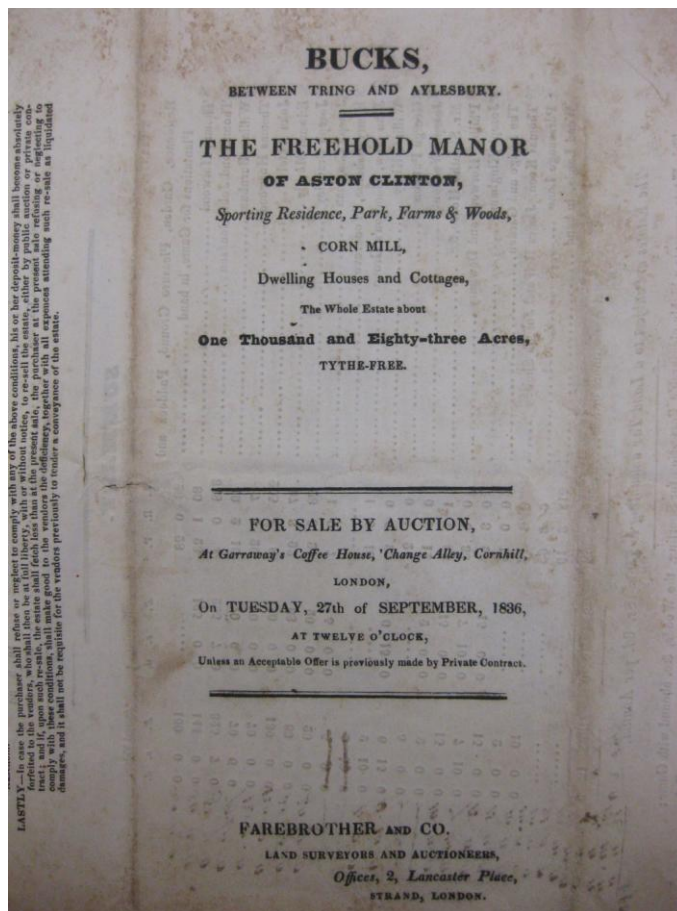


Figure 143: Particulars of sale of Aston Clinton, Bucks, 27 September 1836 (RAL, H&J/S.62)

In 1847 the 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos was declared bankrupt and forced to sell a great deal of his estates and property.¹³ The Aston Clinton estate was amongst those he sold.¹⁴ The Rothschild family decided to purchase this estate of 1,083 acres, with 'most desirable brick-built and stuccoed sporting residence...with offices, gardens, orchard, pleasure ground and small park, and the Home Farm, Church and Hill Farms', including '900 acres of productive land, abounding with game'.¹⁵ The price paid was £26,000.¹⁶

¹³ Including famously the contents of Stowe House, Buckinghamshire in 1848.

¹⁴ 'The Sale of the Duke of Buckingham's Estates', *Bucks Herald*, 21 October 1848.

¹⁵ 'Property', *The Times*, 9 June 1849, p. 11.

¹⁶ Huntington Library, California, ST maps and plans, box 7 (9), Particulars of sale of Aston Clinton, 1848; RAL, H&J, S.62, Particulars and conditions of sale of the Manor of Aston Clinton, 27 September 1836; Gulland, 'Aston Clinton Manor House: from moated site to classical mansion', 196-207.

Purchase by the Rothschild family

It is possible that when the Rothschild family purchased the estate in 1849 Lionel de Rothschild and his three brothers did so in cooperation, each taking a share. Nathaniel de Rothschild had declared in 1851 for example that he would 'willingly take $\frac{1}{4}$ share in Aston Clinton...'¹⁷ However it is more likely that it was Lionel, as head of the English Rothschild Bank at this time, who was named as purchaser of the estate and who held the rights to it. Several documents support this conclusion: a deed dated 1854 between Lionel and the Rector of Aston Clinton refers to the purchase of buildings which Lionel wished to demolish to improve the approach to his house and pleasure grounds at Aston Clinton; further a deed of 1859, again between Lionel and the same Rector, refers to a part of Parsonage Lane which had been allotted to Viscount Lake and which was now in the occupation of Anthony de Rothschild.¹⁸ In addition many deeds survive bearing Lionel's name and those of tenants on the estate after 1848. Finally, and most conclusively, agreements between Lionel and Anthony were composed to establish a life interest in the Aston Clinton estate for Anthony's wife, Louisa (1821-1910), after his death.¹⁹ In addition Lionel was certainly buying other parcels of land in the area in the 1850s and the Aston Clinton estate would seem a logical addition to these acquisitions.²⁰

¹⁷ RAL, XI/109/77/4, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 5 July 1851.

¹⁸ RAL, 000/53/1, Deed between Lionel de Rothschild and the Rector of Aston Clinton, 1854; RAL, 000/107, Deed between Lionel de Rothschild and the Rector of Aston Clinton, 1859.

¹⁹ CBS, 666/28, Indenture between Baron Lionel of New Court and Charles Edward Gee Barnard of 35 Lincolns Inn Fields in the County of Middlesex and the Reverend Charles Watkin Wynne Eyton of Aston Clinton, 25 December 1854; RAL, 000/107, Indenture between Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild of Gunnersbury Park and Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild of No 2 Grosvenor Place Houses, 1 June 1875; RAL, H&J, L.119, Copy deed between Lionel Nathan de Rothschild and Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild, 1 June 1875.

²⁰ See for example RAL 000/765, Abstract of the title of Major Lionel Nathan de Rothschild to hereditaments forming part of the Halton Estate in the County of Bucks, 1918; RAL, 000/68/3, Conveyance of land at Aston Clinton in the County of Buckinghamshire, Mr George Harriott and his wife to the Baron Lionel N de Rothschild, 3 June 1851; RAL, H&J, S.27, Copy conveyance of houses, lands and hereditaments in Aston Clinton, Gerard Warwick Lake to Baron L. N. de Rothschild, 23 January 1857; RAL, H&J, S.70, Draft conveyance of two closes of meadowland at Aston Clinton, George Saunders to Baron Lionel de Rothschild, 23 September 1858; RAL, H&J, B.20, Plan of land at Aston Clinton for sale, Trustees of G. Robinson to Baron L. N. de Rothschild, 23 September 1858; RAL, H&J, B.22, Plan of Homestead and close at Aston Clinton, Lord Leigh and others to Baron L Rothschild, 4 January 1859.



Figure 144: Plan of Aston Clinton Park, 1857 (RAL, H&J/Plans 1.1.1)

It was however Lionel's brother Anthony, along with his wife Louisa and their two daughters (Constance, 1843-1931 and Annie, 1844-1926), who took Aston Clinton as their residence after its purchase. Although he did not own the estate it probably fell to Anthony to reside in the property because Lionel and his wife already had a rural residence at Gunnersbury Park. His brother Nathaniel wrote in 1851 from Paris of the Aston Clinton Estate with the hope that 'Sir Anthony will look well after it and get the rentes [sic] paid'.²¹ As the demands of the business in London eased from around the early 1850s onwards Anthony and his family were able to spend their summer months here.

²¹ RAL, XI/109/77/4, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 5 July 1851.



Figure 145: Sir Anthony de Rothschild, c.1870



Figure 146: Constance and Annie de Rothschild, by Camille Silvy, 1861 (National Portrait Gallery)

Renovation and extension

Certain documents reveal that during Anthony's lifetime significant and expensive alterations were carried out both to the interior and exterior of Aston Clinton House in order

to enlarge and modernise it. The property spread in a ramshackle way, to much expense (in contrast to the ordered and brand new Mentmore), 'remade beyond any wild dreams'.²² No plans or drawings survive to indicate what exactly Anthony's proposed alterations for the original eighteenth-century house were. The only surviving documents that give some idea of the works are a copy of the specifications for building of 1855 between Anthony and builder George Myers, and the contract/accounts of works of 1856-57.²³ The existing house was in a reasonable state of repair and it was perhaps not necessary to build a completely new structure. Instead the house was renovated, improved and extended to make it larger and more comfortable for Anthony and his family. The old eighteenth-century structure was not demolished, but on the whole retained: the specifications stated that 'all the old works of every kind interfered with by the alterations to be made good in all respects; the old portion of the building to be thoroughly repaired.'²⁴ Inside the house doors were re-hung, floors repaired, woodwork repainted and the staircase was renovated and repaired.²⁵

As in the case of Mentmore House Sir Joseph Paxton was also engaged as the architect, and George Myers as the builder. However although Paxton had won the commission it was in reality supervised by his assistant and son-in-law George Stokes, who had already assisted in the construction of Mentmore House. After 1872 the architect George Devey (1820-1886) was engaged to design various buildings lying on the Aston Clinton estate including cottages, the West Lodge stables, and new park gates.

Architectural style

We might ask why Anthony and his brothers did not demolish the old eighteenth-century house at Aston Clinton and begin anew, following the example at Mentmore. Perhaps Anthony, with a greater role to play in the family business than Mayer, and who did not own the estate entirely himself, had slightly different aims in his project. With less time to spare, and with a wife and young family, the building of a new house may have been too

²² William J. Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', *The Woman at Home*, CCXXX (1912), 103-107.

²³ RAL, 000/891, Draft Indenture and Specification between Sir Anthony de Rothschild and George Myers, 1855; RAL, XII/2/0 and XII/41/1, Myers Accounts, 1856-1857.

²⁴ RAL, 000/891, Draft Indenture and Specification between Sir Anthony de Rothschild and George Myers, 1855

²⁵ Ibid.

ambitious a project. Anthony probably preferred to settle for a more modest residence in which to spend his private leisure time with his family. The 5th Earl of Rosebery, who married Mayer's daughter Hannah, described Aston Clinton as the only house owned by the Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury which could be called merely a 'gentleman's residence'.²⁶

The style of the existing classical Italianate eighteenth-century house (which had been built by Gerard Lake) was retained in the new extensions and alterations. The final outcome was a neoclassical mansion, which was at least three times as large as the original house. This house was not unusual for the time: it was in many ways a conventional gentleman's residence. As was implied in the many obituaries written upon his death, Anthony wished to integrate himself into local society and take a position amongst the landed gentry of the Vale of Aylesbury. With this aim in mind he may therefore have felt that the act of demolishing an existing house at Aston Clinton outright would have implied a stark break with the past, and was therefore inadvisable. Similarly rebuilding an entirely new structure may have created too overt a statement of his position as a *nouveau-riche* landowner.

The style of the new mansion imitated and built on that of the existing classical Italianate eighteenth-century house which it engulfed. Jill Franklin writes that 'in the early Victorian period roughly one-third of new country houses were still built in classical styles'. This style was quickly being overtaken by Tudor, Elizabethan or Jacobean and Gothic as the century progressed but it wasn't unusual for an English country house of this period.²⁷ Preserving a structure which might have proclaimed a sense of Englishness and an inherited past in the Vale of Aylesbury may have been an attempt by the Rothschild family to 'blend-in' with the generations-old landed gentry or even aristocratic classes (as may also have been the case for the stylistic choices for Mentmore House). In 1912 William Lacey in the *Woman at Home* remarked that Aston Clinton was 'an English house'.²⁸ Anthony remained cautious therefore in his architectural choices, perhaps reflecting a wish to integrate his family in the area and not advertise their 'otherness'. In addition perhaps the choice was due to financial expediency.

²⁶ Kennedy, 'The success of excess', p. 76.

²⁷ Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House and its Plan*, p. 7.

²⁸ Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', 103-107.



Figure 147: Aston Clinton House, South-East Front, E. J. Mason, 1956 (NMRC)



Figure 148: Aston Clinton House, North-West Front (facing the village), E.J. Mason, 1956 (NMRC)

Interiors and collections

The original interior features of the existing classical Italianate eighteenth-century house seem largely to have been retained and simply renovated. For example doors were re-hung, floors repaired, woodwork repainted, and the staircase restored and repaired.²⁹ As no contemporary nineteenth-century photographs of the interior of the mansion survive there is limited evidence to suggest how exactly it was furnished. Photographs of 1956 taken just before the house was demolished (and therefore empty of all contents) reveal a

²⁹ RAL, 000/891, Draft Indenture and Specification between Anthony de Rothschild and George Myers, 1855.

grand and imposing double storey neoclassical entrance hall with a monumental chimneypiece, Doric columns and marble reliefs on the walls. These photographs also show a drawing room presented in the neoclassical style, with decorative white carved panels, a large mirror set into an ornate scheme above the chimneypiece and elaborate doors. The neoclassical features of these rooms probably dated to the eighteenth-century and composed the original interior of the house when it was first built.



Figure 149: Aston Clinton House, Entrance Hall, by E.J. Mason, May 1956 (NMRC)



Figure 150: Aston Clinton House, Entrance Hall, by E.J. Mason, May 1956 (NMRC)



Figure 151: Aston Clinton House, Drawing Room (1), by E. J. Mason, May 1956 (NMRC)



Figure 152: Aston Clinton House, Drawing Room (1), by E. J. Mason, May 1956 (NMRC)

Along with the preservation of the original eighteenth-century interior features there was also a moderate attempt by Anthony to introduce French Rococo-revival elements into certain interior schemes. Indeed Anthony's private receipts reveal that a good deal of French detailing had been executed for the interior of the mansion by 'Mons. Joyeau'.³⁰ A further drawing room was presented in a style more closely corresponding to the French-Rococo, entirely fitted out with white carved panels. It contained a large mirror placed above a marble chimneypiece, a fanciful painted ceiling, and a set of painted overdoors, probably by Nicolas Lancret.

³⁰ RAL, XII/41/1/76, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: Joyeau, 1 June 1857; RAL, XII/41/1/233, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: Joyeau, 8 March 1858.



Figure 153: Aston Clinton House, Drawing Room (2), by E. J. Mason, May 1956 (NMRC)

Anthony's private receipts provide details of many of the craftsmen he employed in the renovation of his mansion and the nature and extent of the work undertaken.³¹ Samuel Pratt for example (listed in the 1847 Post Office Directory as 'Cabinet maker, upholsterer & importer of Ancient Furniture & Armour &c') was employed for the 'carving of cornices, pilasters and dados' as well as doors and a 'marble chimneypiece'.³² Notably he was also commissioned to create a 'magnificent carved room' (perhaps the French Rococo drawing room). George Jackson and Sons was commissioned for work including 'skirting, cornicing and carving in saloon and dining room', also 'paper maché work, carpentry and mouldings'. This firm had begun creating interior decorative elements from about 1780 and were one of the first to introduce fibrous plaster into England.³³ Finally the Belgian Adolphe Boucneau (also employed by Mayer at Mentmore House) worked as a 'sculptor and marble decorator' producing marble work and chimneypieces.³⁴ These commissions show that a good deal of new decorative features must have been added to the mansion in the 1850s and 60s. These appear to have been on the whole reproduction panelling, marble chimneypieces and skirting, cornicing or carvings. Whilst certain of the original eighteenth-century architectural features of the interior of the house were retained it is evident Anthony considerably updated many rooms in the fashionable French eighteenth-century style, a mode of presentation which matched the type of fine and decorative art objects Anthony already possessed.

³¹ RAL, XII/41/1-3, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts.

³² RAL, XII/41/1/19, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: Samuel Pratt, 24 January 1857.

³³ RAL, XII/41/1/73, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: George Jackson and Sons, 1 June 1857; The firm was later employed by Anthony's nephew, Alfred, for the interior decoration of Halton House.

³⁴ RAL, XII/1/2/105, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts, Boucneau, 1 July 1861; RAL, XII/41/2/317, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts, Boucneau, 5 May 1863.

A further room captured in photographs of 1956 reveals that the interiors of the house were eclectic: the 'Winter Garden' with its monumental dark oak fireplace and dark oak panelling was presented in the Jacobethan style. In 1912 William Lacey of *The Woman at Home* reported that this room had 'dark oak and tapestry' and was 'upholstered in rich tints that harmonise therewith'.³⁵ The upper parts of the walls of the room were probably hung with tapestries, further emphasising the luxury of the room.



Figure 154: Aston Clinton House, Winter Garden, by E. J. Mason, May 1956 (NMRC)



Figure 155: One of a set of four Gobelins tapestries, featuring designs signed by Boucher (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, objects of art and tapestry formed by the late Sir Anthony de Rothschild, Bt. between 1840 and 1850 removed from Aston Clinton, Aylesbury* [London: Christie, Mason and Woods, 13 June 1923])

³⁵ Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', 103-107.

Whilst surviving evidence concerning the collections of *objets d'art* that Anthony may have housed in his residence in the Vale of Aylesbury is not in abundance, certain general conclusions can be drawn from that which is available.³⁶ In a similar way to Mayer de Rothschild, Anthony had begun collecting and developing his tastes in interior style before he considered residing at Aston Clinton, he was after all in his 40s when he took over the residence and already had a London mansion. It is unlikely the mansion featured many paintings in its decoration due to the presence of so much panelling in the major reception rooms. In addition, as revealed in sale catalogues of the 1920s, perhaps as many as four rooms were hung with sets of Gobelins or Aubusson tapestries. This was not the house where Anthony kept his collections of paintings therefore; instead his residence in London was the location for the majority of these objects. Anthony's collection at his town house was strong in Dutch and Flemish works: it is impossible to say if such works were kept at Aston Clinton House, yet the more muted, countryside nature of the residence may well have suited them, particularly cabinet pictures and outdoor genre scenes. In addition to the overdoors by Lancret it is possible Anthony displayed some French eighteenth-century paintings by Jean Baptiste Greuze, Antoine Watteau and François Boucher.³⁷ In addition there may have been some English works depicting hunting dogs and hunting scenes: this was a taste similar to that of his brother Mayer at Mentmore.³⁸ Unlike his brother Lionel (and Lionel's sons) there is no evidence to suggest Anthony owned any eighteenth-century portraits of this school.

³⁶ The volume of surviving evidence may also be an indication as the relative size of Anthony's collections in this area as compared with those of his brothers.

³⁷ *Christie's Auction Catalogue, Pictures by Old Masters and Some Watercolour Drawings: the property of the Hon. Mrs Yorke, late of 17 Curzon Street, W1 and Hamble Cliff, Netley, Southampton* (London: Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods, 6 May 1927).

³⁸ RAL, XII/41/1/603, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: John Barwick, 29 August 1860; RAL, XII/41/1/630, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: John Barwick, 6 December 1860; RAL, XII/41/2/133, Anthony de Rothschild receipted accounts: John Barwick, 26 May 1862.

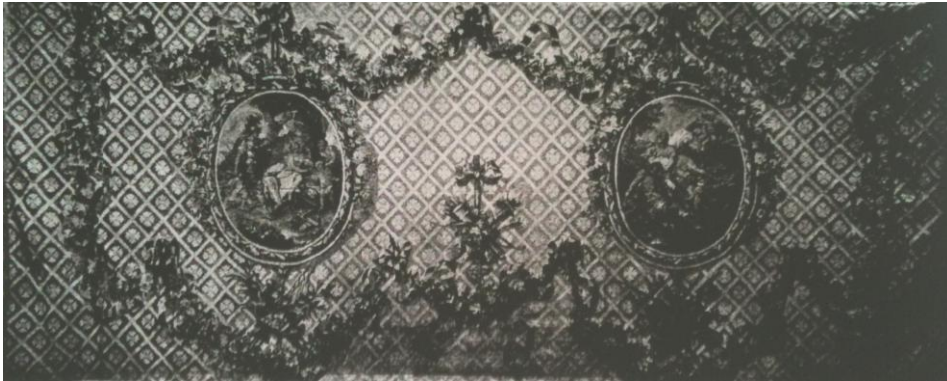


Figure 156: One of a set of three panels of Aubusson tapestry, with subjects of Mars, Venus, Bacchus and other figures in oval medallions (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])

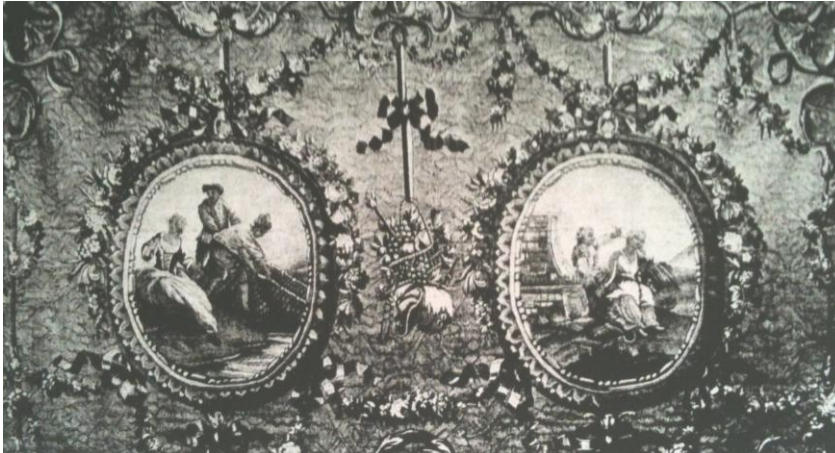


Figure 157: One of five panels of Aubusson tapestry, with figure subjects emblematic of the Seasons (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])



Figure 158: François Boucher, *The Dispatch of the Messenger* (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Pictures by Old Masters and Some Watercolour Drawings* [6 May 1927])

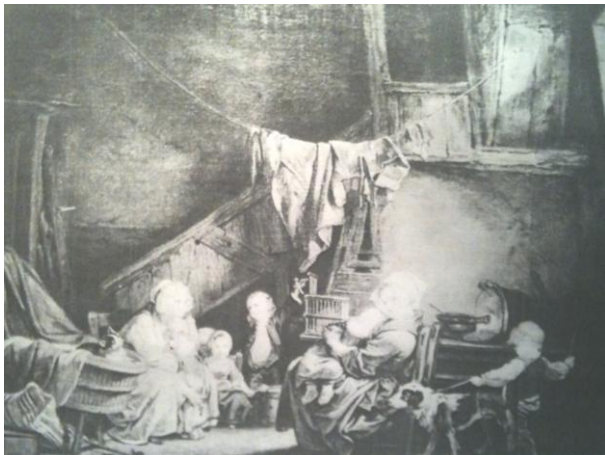


Figure 159: Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Les Sevreuses* (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Pictures by Old Masters and Some Watercolour Drawings* [6 May 1927])

Constance, Lady Battersea (Anthony's daughter), suggested that overall the type of collections which were found at Aston Clinton were predominantly French. In her *Reminiscences* she noted 'as usual my father was most particular in furnishing [Aston Clinton] according to the prevailing fashion for French art.'³⁹ Lacey of *The Woman at Home* also noted that 'Aston Clinton is full of dainty and precious things...and rich in articles of

³⁹ Battersea, *Reminiscences*, p. 11.

vertu, especially old china...and *bric-a-brac*'.⁴⁰ Sale catalogues of the contents of the house of 1923 and 1927 confirm Battersea's account: overwhelmingly the objects and furniture on display at Aston Clinton House dated to the French eighteenth-century (or in the case of furniture were modern reproductions in this style).⁴¹ French Sèvres porcelain cups, vases, dishes, plates, tazza, ormolu candelabras and bronzes abounded in the sale catalogues of the 1920s, along with hundreds of other objects of continental workmanship (including rock-crystal objects, marble sculpture, Limoges enamels, glass vases, ivory figures and caskets, snuff boxes, tortoiseshell and agate objects). Furniture was generally highly decorative, with ormolu, marquetry, and marble details and a number of known eighteenth-century French craftsmen were represented in the collection (for example Jacques Dubois, G Peridiez, R. Lacroix, Jacques Caffieri, J.L. Cosson).



Figure 160: A Louis XV Marquetry table, finely inlaid with bouquets and sprays of flowers and panels of cube pattern in various woods (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])

⁴⁰ Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', 103-107.

⁴¹ What Anthony's collection of *objets d'art* did not have in common with those of his brothers were items which might be identified as *Schatzkammer* works: few Renaissance works of precious metal appear in the Christie's auction catalogues of 1923 and 1927, or indeed in Anthony's personal receipts.



Figure 161: A Louis XV marquetry table, of kidney shape, inlaid with a musical trophy and branches of flowers (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])



Figure 162: A Louis XVI semi-circular commode, painted with Amorini sporting, the centre panels mounted with handles formed as lions' masks holding rings (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])



Figure 163: A screen composed of six Louis XVI panels, painted with figures from the Italian Pantomime, carytid figures Cupids and arabesques *Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry: the property of the Hon. Mrs Yorke, removed from 17 Curzon Street, W1 and Hamble Cliff, Netley, Southampton* (London: Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods, 5 May 1927)



Figure 164: A suite of Louis XVI furniture in walnut-wood, carved with branches of flowers, lions' masks, acanthus foliage and fluting on a gilt ground, the seats and backs covered with flowered pink silk brocade (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])



Figure 165: A pair of Boulle cabinets, the panels inlaid with vases of flowers and arabesque foliage in engraved brass and white metal on ebony ground (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])



Figure 166: A Kingwood Regence commode, with shaped front, mounted with ormolu corners, borders, handles and escutcheons (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])

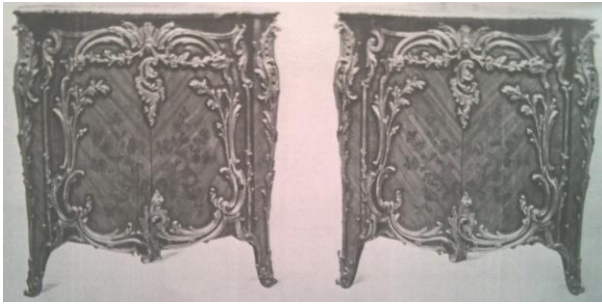


Figure 167: A pair of Louis XV marquetry encoignures with shaped fronts (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])

The fate of a great deal of the paintings, furniture and *objets d'art* compiled by Anthony is unclear. Upon his death in 1876 the entire property and contents passed to his wife, Louisa de Rothschild (1821–1910, née Montefiore), but no inventory of this time survives. After Louisa's death the property reverted to Anthony's nephews (Nathaniel, Alfred and Leopold de Rothschild) jointly, and the house was eventually given over to the Commanding Officer of the Twenty-First Division during the First World War. The collections however remained the property of Anthony's daughters, Constance (who married the 1st Baron Battersea in 1877) and Annie (1844-1926, who married the Hon. Elliot Yorke in 1873). Large parts of these collections were sold in 1923 and 1927 by Anthony's daughter at Christie's and Philips; the contents of these auction catalogues therefore allow some degree of speculation as to what would have been found inside Aston Clinton House in the nineteenth century and what Anthony may have been most inclined to collect.⁴² In addition Anthony's personal receipts also help to identify certain art objects and items of furniture that he purchased, many of which were probably intended for his residence in the Vale of Aylesbury.

⁴² *Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* (13 June 1923); *Christie's Auction Catalogue, Pictures by Old Masters and Some Watercolour Drawings* (6 May 1927); *Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* (5 May 1927).



Figure 168: A pair of Louis XVI candelabras designed as vases of enamelled metal (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])



Figure 169: A pair of Louis XVI candelabras with bronze figures of nymphs supporting ormolu acanthus foliage (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])



Figure 170: A vase and cover of oviform shape, painted with Morin subjects of quay scenes on gros-bleu and gold ground, with white and gold scroll handles festooned with laurels (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])



Figure 171: A Louis XVI clock by Lapaute with white enamel dial, with figures of Cupids at the base with emblems of literature and time (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art and Tapestry* [13 June 1923])



Figure 172: A Louis XVI clock in a vase-shaped case of gros-bleu Sèvres porcelain, with horizontal revolving dials and an ormolu figure of a serpent pointing the hour (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])



Figure 173: A Louis XVI clock with enamel dial 'showing the calendar and celestial movements, the scroll supports of ormolu mounted with enamel plaques painted with classical subjects, jewelled with pearl ornaments (*Christie's Auction Catalogue, Old French Furniture, Objects of Art, Porcelain and Tapestry* [5 May 1927])

Interiors and collections: conclusion

The reasons for the moderate interior refurbishment of Aston Clinton House (rather than wholesale renovation and introduction of completely new interiors) can be identified if the nature and intended function of the mansion is examined. Aston Clinton was not a new mansion, and its interiors could not therefore be newly created as at Mentmore House. Furthermore its exterior did not compare to the grand and imposing Mentmore House or the later ostentatious Rothschild houses at Halton and Waddesdon. Anthony de Rothschild therefore chose to retain and simply refurbish certain of the original eighteenth-century interiors of his mansion which were more sympathetic to the original architecture of the exterior. This more reserved attitude was perhaps a reflection of Anthony's wish to preserve Aston Clinton as a moderate gentleman's residence and retain its links with the local area as an English country house. Such a choice avoided advertising that the Rothschild family were outsiders who had 'arrived' in the Vale of Aylesbury.

Letters between Rothschild family members suggest that in the nineteenth century Aston Clinton House was imbued with a happy, relaxed atmosphere. The house was a country retreat, intended as a family residence for Anthony, his wife, and their two daughters, and the entertainment of select guests. At the age of 39, and with two young children Anthony had different requirements for his country residence than those of his newly married brother Mayer at Mentmore, and ostentatious bachelor nephew Alfred at Halton. It is possible that Anthony felt less confident in making grand stylistic statements than his brother Mayer, and so maintained a more muted taste which was less progressive and more traditional. Anthony was after all eight years his senior. Furthermore Anthony played a more active role in the Rothschild bank than his brother Mayer and therefore perhaps had less time and resources for his country residence.

Several of the interiors at Aston Clinton House, however, were renovated more extensively and presented in the French Rococo style. Furthermore the furnishings, furniture and *objets d'art* which Anthony kept at his residence were predominantly of French manufacture. He also amassed other valuable and decorative continental items typical of the Rothschild taste of this period.

As in the case of Mentmore House this combination of English exterior architecture and continental-style interiors is noteworthy. It is likely that Anthony's collections of art objects and furniture, and his preference for continental and historical modes of interior decoration were formed before he came to inhabit Aston Clinton House. The choice to display French eighteenth-century art objects and furniture in his mansion probably therefore reflected Anthony's personal tastes, which must have been directed partly by his experiences of continental travel and his contact with the wider European Rothschild family. As in the case of his brother Mayer it may have also been driven by a fascination with the *Ancien Régime*, and the wish to purchase some of the finest quality objects available on the market. Furthermore these were the kind of objects and furnishings most readily available on the market of this period, and the dealers Anthony chose to employ (as well as his contact with members of the Collectors Club) probably directed his choices.

Finally Aston Clinton was a country residence intended to provide hospitality and entertainment. The objects and styles Anthony favoured created elegant and attractive interiors, but also ones which could be opulent and affluent. This creation of luxurious, lavish interiors may have been a deliberate attempt by Anthony to impress the 'distinguished persons of all classes and professions' who visited Aston Clinton and emphasise his continental connections, status and wealth.⁴³ The combination at Aston Clinton of authentic features and fittings with newly refurbished Francophile interiors meant the mansion could be both a luxurious showcase for European art and furniture, as well as an intimate lived-in family home.

Contemporary reception

Aston Clinton House, altered and extended by the Rothschild family, has not been widely admired today and has been rather negatively assessed by many architectural historians.⁴⁴ Surviving contemporary remarks are few: Sir Edward Hamilton, a frequent guest of the Rothschild family in the Vale in the late nineteenth century, found the house to

⁴³ 'Death of Sir Anthony Rothschild, Bart.', *The Morning Post*, Wednesday 5 January 1876, p. 5, Issue 32299.

⁴⁴ Chadwick, *The Works of Sir Joseph Paxton*, p. 195.

be a 'truly gorgeous mansion...in which there are some very striking features, notably the hall and conservatory'.⁴⁵

No other contemporary nineteenth-century opinions about or descriptions of the house survive. Later in 1903 an author of *Country Life* remarked that Aston Clinton was a place of 'singular beauty'.⁴⁶ The only other account which gives us some indication of the appearance of the house in Anthony's lifetime dates to sometime later in 1912: Lacey of the *Woman at Home* remarked: 'It is not a new house, like Halton and Waddesdon Manor. But it has been remade beyond any wild dreams that could have lurked in the background of the earliest plans.'⁴⁷ He added 'coming into the possession of Sir Anthony it underwent great modifications, and increased in dignity...the whole effect is exceedingly fine.'⁴⁸



Figure 174: Exterior of Aston Clinton House, Larkin, c.1942 (NMRC)

⁴⁵ *Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton, 1883-1885*, ed. by Dudley W. R. Bahlman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 2 June 1884, 1 March 1885.

⁴⁶ 'Tring Park, Hertfordshire, the Seat of Lord Rothschild', *Country Life*, XIV (1903), 724-726.

⁴⁷ Lacey, 'Two Rothschild Homes in Buckinghamshire', 103-107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



Figure 175: Aston Clinton House, Lord Battersea, late nineteenth century (NMRC)

Chapter Ten

Tring Park House

The Rothschild family purchased the Tring Park estate in the Vale of Aylesbury in 1872. This chapter will demonstrate that the purchase of the estate by the family was driven not by a wish to mask a *nouveau-riche* background and accumulate land and country houses in an attempt to achieve 'gentrification', but rather by a desire by family members to invest further in land in an area they knew well, and to establish homes near to one another. In addition it will be shown that the extension and renovation of the existing house at Tring Park supported its role as a residence away from London in which to entertain, and enjoy leisure time. Furthermore this chapter will illustrate that the architectural style adopted for the newly renovated house retained some of its original English character, but also introduced certain new fashions. That this was somewhat of a transitional house for the family in the Vale of Aylesbury, embracing a sense of historical legitimacy but yet expressing a certain Rothschild confidence, will be considered.

Along with the alteration of its exterior, the interior of Tring Park House was largely refitted in the 1880s by Nathaniel, ostensibly in the late-seventeenth- or early-eighteenth-century style of the original house. At the age of 40, and with three children ranging in age from three to 12, Nathaniel had much in common with his uncle Anthony at Aston Clinton when he began renovations to the mansion. The residence was as a result similarly intended as a family retreat, and a private venue at which to entertain select guests, in contrast to the showier examples of Mentmore House and Halton House, which were both newly built in grand proportions. This chapter will show that as a result there was an emphasis at Tring Park on the original character and features of the existing house. It will also be shown however that Nathaniel included elements of the Italian Renaissance and French eighteenth-century styles in the interiors of his mansion. These were styles which his family considered as indicative of good taste and the best expression of their sensibilities. They were also styles which were recreated with ease in this period with objects and furnishings that were readily valuable on the market or offered by dealers.

Tring Park, 1680-1705

The estate of Tring which the Rothschild family purchased lay nine miles from Aylesbury and four miles from Aston Clinton. By the time it was acquired by the family the estate boasted an existing country house and the nearby town of Tring was a thriving market community. A recognised estate at Tring can be traced as far back as the Domesday survey, when it belonged to the crown and was described as the 'Manor of Tring'.¹ During the time of Charles II the estate belonged to Henry Guy (1631-1710), Groom to the Bedchamber and Clerk of the Treasury. In the early 1680s Guy chose to enclose his 250 acre estate at Tring and build a new house.² It is possible that Guy commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to design this new building, though this is far from certain. One of the only pieces of documentary evidence supporting this claim is a letter dated 14 May 1687 in which Wren mentioned a visit to Tring.³ If Wren was the architect this was an unusual commission for him.⁴

¹ Before the Norman conquest the estate was owned by a priest called Engelric. It then passed to the crown and was granted to Count Eustace of Boulogne, a supporter of William I. In 1157 it was granted to the Abbey of Faversham in Kent and then in 1340 transferred to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Reverting to the crown in 1546 it was then granted to various individuals, but it is not known what happened to the estate during the years of the Commonwealth. Records began again in 1679 when the manor was granted to Henry Guy: 'Parishes: Tring with Long Marston', *The Victoria History of the County of Buckingham*, ed. by Page, II, pp. 281-294.

² It was rumoured that Guy paid for his new house with funds directly from the Treasury: 'Tring with Long Marston', pp. 281-294.

³ M. Whinney, *Architectural Journal*, 110 (1953), p. 210.

⁴ The only similar country house designed by Wren still in existence is in Winslow, Buckinghamshire.

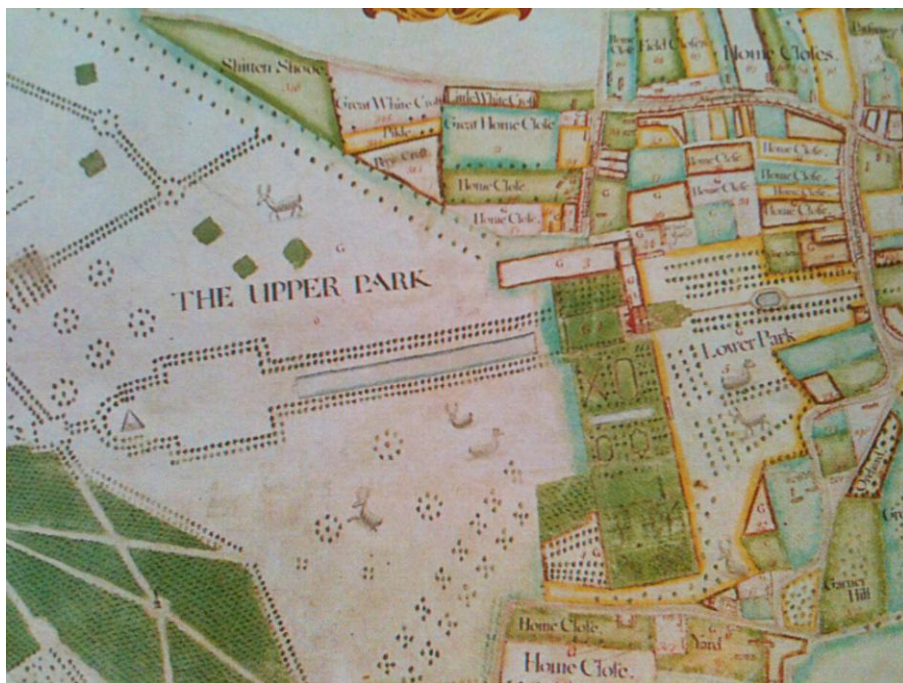
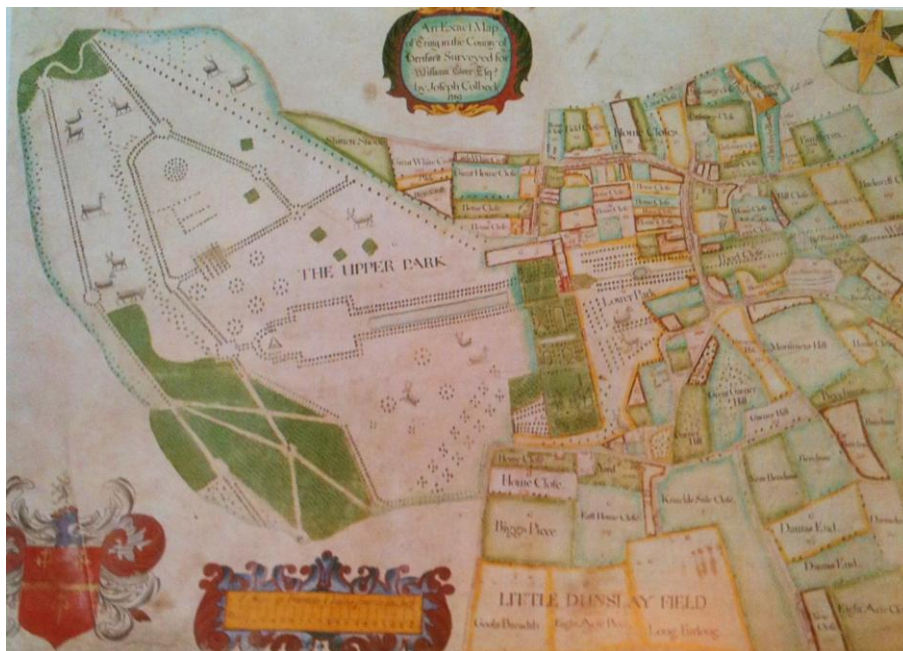


Figure 176: Map of Tring Park, based on a survey of 1719, but probably made in the 1730s (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)

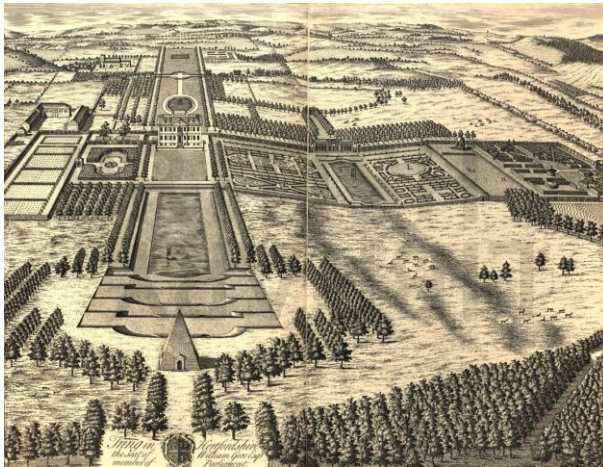


Figure 177: Engraving of Tring Park, 1739 by J. Badeslade (J. Badeslade and J. Rocque *Vitruvius Britannicus or The British Architect 1715-1725*, 4 vols [New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967], IV)

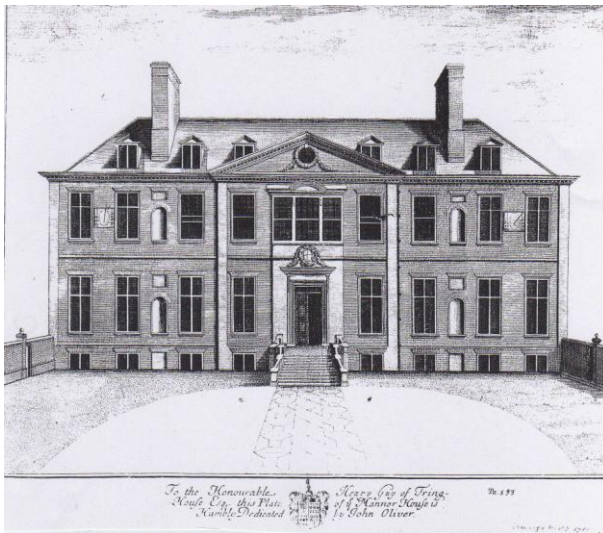


Figure 178: Tring Park House, South Front, c.1700, inscribed 'To the Honourable Henry Guy of Tring House Esq. this Plate of his Manor House is Humbly Dedicated by John Oliver' (Sir H. Chauncy, *The Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire* [London, 1700])

Guy's new house was situated a quarter of a mile from the High Street of Tring Village (soon to be a market town). The house boasted a large park which extended away to the south, as well as agricultural and woodland to the south-east. It was built to a symmetrical plan (typical of the time), three rooms deep, and the north and south elevations were almost identical in appearance and plan. The house boasted a large staircase and a two-storey Great Hall at its centre. In 1690 Roger North (1653-1734) described the house in

his manuscript *Of Building*, stating that the house was 'the Invention of Sr Chr Wren and I think it ye only intire hous he hath done, except Winchester'.⁵ North also provided an account of its layout, describing two rooms on either side of the 'porch', and the two flight staircase as well as the Great Parlour and Great Hall which contained a first floor gallery and domed ceiling:

At the other end of ye hall is a double order of Columns wch make a screen and carry a floor upon ye entablature of ye first wch is a Gallery above and ye entrance of ye house is underneath it...from ye ceiling a shell is lifted up, Cuppolo wise over ye Gallery wch looks well underneath.⁶

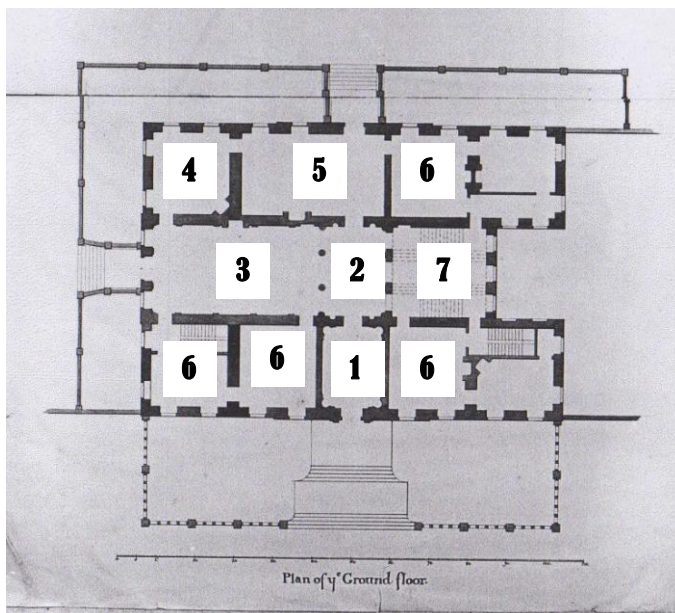


Figure 179: Tring Park House, room designations c.1680, according to Roger North (*Of Building: Roger North's Writings on Architecture*, ed. by H. M. Colvin and J. Newman [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981], pp. 73-4)

1 – Entrance Hall, 2 – Porch, 3 – Great Hall, 4 – Antechamber, 5 – Withdrawing Room or Great Parlour (later the State Bedchamber and State Dressing Room), 6 – Ground Floor Apartments, 7 – Staircase

⁵ *Of Building: Roger North's Writings on Architecture*, ed. by H. M. Colvin and J. Newman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 73-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 180: Tring Park House, Library ceiling, 2011. This ceiling may have been created when the original house was built by Guy in the late seventeenth century.⁷

William III dined at Tring Park in June 1690 and Guy was made a Commissioner of Customs in 1691. Soon after however he was charged with accepting a bribe and sent to the Tower of London. In 1705 he sold the Tring estate to Sir William Gore (d. 1710), a banker and former Lord Mayor of London.

Tring Park, 1705-1786

In 1710 William Gore was succeeded at Tring by his son (also William, d. 1739). William Gore the younger employed the architect James Gibbs (1682-1754) to alter and improve the existing house. What Gibbs did at Tring exactly is unclear as records do not survive to document his work. Gervase Jackson-Stops believes he redecorated the State Bedchamber and State Dressing Room of the ground floor (formerly the Withdrawing Room or Great Parlour): he probably designed the two ceilings of these two rooms which are still seen today, as well as the chimney-pieces for each.⁸

⁷ Though it is possible this ceiling is an imitation created by a later owner in the 1780s.

⁸ These rooms later became Lady Rothschild's ground floor apartments (sometimes the Boudoir) and today two adjoining classrooms. The chimney-pieces feature both Louis XIII Renaissance and Rococo elements. These relate closely to Gibbs' other known works: for example the ceiling of the salon at Ditchley, Oxfordshire or one designed by him for Gubbins (Gobions) mansion, Hertfordshire. The chimney-piece of the State

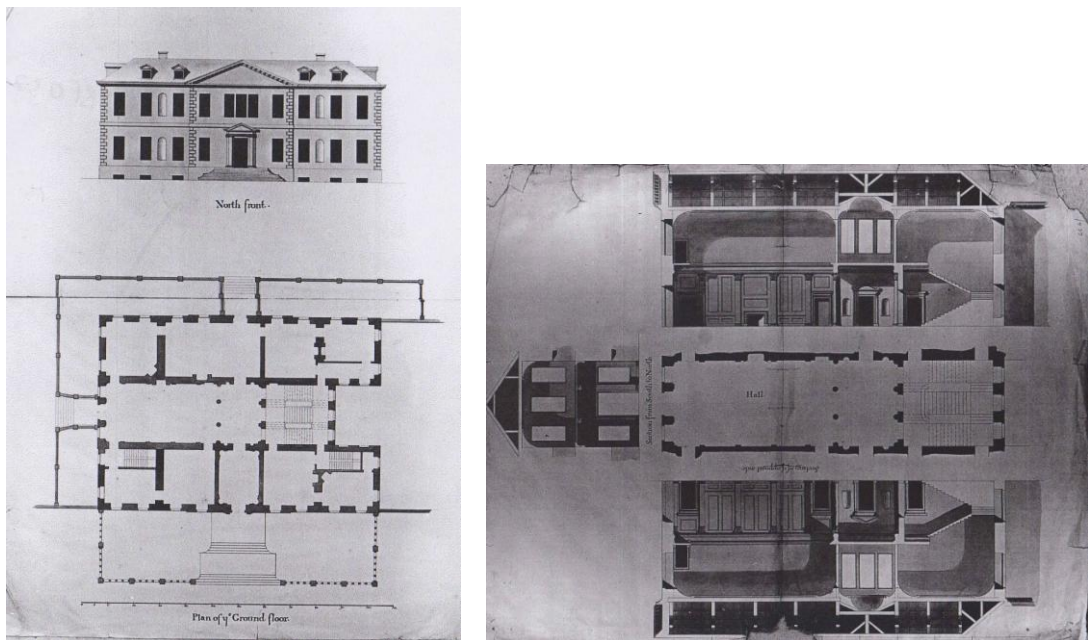


Figure 181: Tring Park House, North Front, ground plan (entrance at South Front) and Sections (taken through the two-storey central hall and staircase), c.1720, possibly the work of James Gibbs when the house was being altered in the 1720s (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)



Figure 182: Tring Park House, eighteenth-century ceilings of the former State Bedchamber and its adjoining State Dressing Room, probably designed by James Gibbs, 2011



Figure 183: Tring Park House, chimney-pieces of the State Dressing Room and the State Bedchamber (the latter today installed in the Entrance Hall) probably designed by James Gibbs

In the 1720s William Gore the younger also employed Gibbs and Charles Bridgeman (1690-1738) to create highly elaborate baroque-style gardens for the park at Tring.⁹ Gore also commissioned a new baroque-style stable block to the west of the main house in 1709, probably built to designs by Gibbs.¹⁰ This building was presumably the 'Tring Park Mansion Stabling and Coach Houses' that were rented in the 1840s by Lionel de Rothschild.¹¹

⁹ Bridgeman's elaborate schemes centred on a large canal at the south of the house, along with orthogonal groves of tree and parterre gardens in geometric arrangements. The great avenues he created, with focal points and axial views, beyond were reminiscent of gardens like those at Versailles.

¹⁰ Now called the Clock House, this red brick, two-storey structure has a striking baroque design featuring a tall projecting central section surmounted by a clock.

¹¹ RAL, RFam, 109/43, Lionel de Rothschild to Edmund Carrington and J. Gleinster, 1840.



Figure 184: Tring Park House, Stable Block (now called the Clock Tower), Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

Tring Park, 1786-1816

Upon his death in 1739 William Gore the younger bequeathed the Tring estate to his son Charles. In 1786 Charles died without issue and consequently the Tring estate was sold to Sir Drummond Smith (1740-1816), son of a London merchant and himself probably a London banker. Drummond Smith was responsible for several considerable alterations to Tring Park house in the 1780s: he moved the main entrance to the east side and had a *porte cochère* built here; he enlarged the south side of the house; replaced the eaves-cornices of the original house with parapet; rendered over the original Wren brick exterior to give the impression that the house was made of stone; and refurbished the interior.¹² He also probably altered the ceiling of the Great Hall - by 1808 E.W. Brayley in his *Beauties of England and Wales* wrote that the 'handsome Gallery or Ballroom' had a circular dome in the centre.¹³

Tring Park, 1816-1872

The Tring estate was once again sold upon the death of Sir Drummond Smith in 1816. By now the Grand Union Canal had arrived in the area (1805), running just a mile from the

¹² As well as laying a new driveway to the house from this side and removing the approach at the North Front.

¹³ E. W. Brayley, *Beauties of England and Wales*, 18 vols (London: Vernor, Hood & Sharpe, 1807), III (1802), p. 146.

house and bringing a good deal of commercial and industrial traffic to the town. In 1820 the estate appeared for sale in *The Times*. The house of the 'very capital, valuable, and highly desirable Tring Park Estate' was described as

a regular substantial pile of buildings, containing a magnificent entrance-hall, 30 feet high and 60 feet long, paved with marble, and terminated by a double screen of columns, forming an approach to a grand staircase, which ascends to a music gallery, or ball room, 75 feet long by 16 feet, intersecting the first floor: a grand range of lofty apartments on each side of the entrance-hall, among which are dining rooms and drawing rooms, each near 37 feet by 22 feet, library, billiard room, &c.: abundant accommodation on the bedchamber and attic floors for a numerous family of distinction, and for a large establishment of domestics; stabling, pleasure grounds, kitchen garden, hot-house, ice-house, &c.: the mansion seated on a commanding spot, environed by a beautiful park, which is moulded by the hands of nature into swelling lawns, and crowned by a lofty amphitheatre of woods, among the finest in the kingdom.¹⁴

William Kay (d. 1838) purchased the estate at the 1820 auction. Kay, the son of a yeoman farmer, was born in Cumberland and had established himself in the textile industry in Manchester. A trade directory of 1804 lists William Kay as a cotton manufacturer, with a mill in Watling Street, Manchester.¹⁵ As a result it is possible that during the early-nineteenth century Kay was acquainted with Nathan Mayer Rothschild who had begun the English Rothschilds' first successful business enterprise in textile trading and finance in Manchester in about 1798. Kay was succeeded at Tring in 1838 by his son, also William (d. 1865). He and his wife were childless, and after his death the estate was sold: it was eventually offered for auction in 1872. Though no evidence exists to support firmly the idea that the Rothschild family and the Kay family knew one another, one might conjecture that this potential acquaintance heightened the Rothschild family's interest in Tring Park.

¹⁴ 'Property', *The Times*, 20 July 1820, p. 4.

¹⁵ Wendy Austin, *Tring Personalities* (Berkhamsted: W. Austin, 2003).

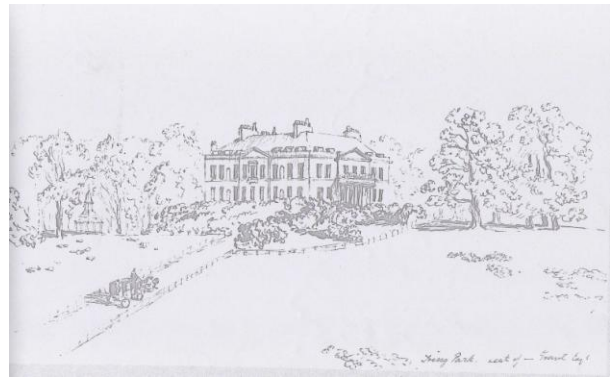


Figure 185: Tring Park House, South Front, c.1830 (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)



Figure 186: Tring Park House, South Front, in the 1830s (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)



Figure 187: Tring Park House, J. Buckler, 1838 (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)

Renovation and extension

Lionel de Rothschild had rented the stabling and coach house on the Tring Park estate from the 1840s. Lionel evidently knew and admired the estate (which was around 3,500 acres) when it came up for sale in 1872 and decided to purchase it for nearly £250,000.¹⁶ The sales brochure accompanying the sale of 1872 described the estate as comprising

3643 acres of arable, pasture and woodland...together with a Noble Mansion and a magnificent timbered Deer Park of 300 acres. Beautifully varied in Hill and Dale, and having a very fine Hanging Wood and Rookery...Stabling for Sixteen Horses. Two Double Coach-houses, Brew House, Venison House, Lofts &c. Farm Yard with Barn, Stalls for Ten Cows, and numerous useful Buildings.

Tring Park was the third substantial house established by the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury. It was intended not for Lionel himself however but his eldest son, Nathaniel de Rothschild (1840-1915, created 1st Lord Rothschild in 1885). With an established large residence at Gunnersbury Park, Lionel did not need an additional property. Lionel's position as the eldest, and head of the Rothschild bank, also helps to explain why he did not follow his brothers in establishing himself in the Vale of Aylesbury. He and his wife Charlotte split their time between their London home and their existing villa at Gunnersbury Park. Here they enjoyed the country air, cultivating the gardens and took an interest in farming, but essentially led a time-consuming London life. Lionel's energies as regards property were also focused for some time in the 1850s and 60s on the purchase and renovation of his London property. In addition his mother Hannah was still resident at Gunnersbury until her death in 1850 and required company. Virginia Cowles goes so far as to suggest that 'as it was much too large, Mrs Nathan asked Lionel and his wife to share it with her, and to take over running of the place'.¹⁷ Upon Hannah's death it would have been perhaps inappropriate to give up the family's traditional country seat on which much energy had already been focused, and so here Lionel remained.

¹⁶ 'Property', *The Times*, 20 July 1870, p. 4; CBS, DX258/13, Particulars and conditions of sale, Tring Park Estate, 7 May 1872.

¹⁷ Cowles, *The Rothschilds: a Family of Fortune*, p. 92.



Figure 188: Nathaniel de Rothschild, by Camille Silvy, 1861 (National Portrait Gallery)

In May 1872 Constance, Lady Battersea (1843-1931, daughter of Anthony de Rothschild) wrote in her diary that her Uncle Lionel and his son Nathaniel had gone to look over Tring Park.¹⁸ She noted shortly after: 'Great news, Tring Park is bought and will belong to Emmy' (Nathaniel's wife).¹⁹ So it was Nathaniel who, with his wife Emma Louise de Rothschild (1844-1935) and their children Lionel Walter (1868-1937), Charlotte (1873-1847) and Nathaniel Charles (1877-1923), took the estate as their residence in the Vale of Aylesbury in 1874.

It is possible to estimate the size and composition of Tring Park House when purchased by Lionel as many contemporary drawings of the house exist. In addition its outline can be seen on a map of Tring Park of 1877:

¹⁸ British Library, Add. MS. 47924, fos. 63, 66, Diaries of Lady Battersea 1858-1928, May 1872

¹⁹ Ibid.

Architect and builder

It has long been assumed the alterations at Tring Park were guided by the architect George Devey who was also engaged at Mentmore from the 1860s and at Aston Clinton from 1872.²⁰ This attribution however is far from certain. Tring's more detailed records were destroyed during the Second World War and nothing remains to confirm Devey's connection to the works. Yet, as Devey had already been employed on several other country house projects in the Vale of Aylesbury for the Rothschild family, it is possible he could have been employed at Tring Park also. Substantial payments from Lionel in the period in question are recorded in Devey's cashbook: from 1875-78 he was paid £603.14.2d for travelling expenses for example.²¹ Jill Allibone feels these payments reveal 'a major work was in hand'. She feels this was unlikely to have been improvements to Lionel's London house in Piccadilly or connected to Gunnersbury Park.²²

Curiously however a set of plans exist at Tring Park School today which date from the 1880s and are signed 'W.R. Rogers' (see Figure 191). William Rogers (or Rodriguez) had been employed by Leopold de Rothschild and by Nathaniel's younger brother Alfred for his mansion at Halton. It is possible, knowing of the work for his brothers, Nathaniel commissioned Rogers to draw up proposals for the alterations at Tring. It is not known for certain if he was the architect chosen for the final project, but the alterations he devised are largely those which were executed.²³ As discussed in Chapter Four George Myers was likely to have been commissioned as the builder for the project.²⁴

²⁰ Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', 80-83; Kennedy, 'The success of excess: aspects of Englishness in some of the Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury', 75-90.

²¹ Allibone, *George Devey*, p. 100.

²² Ibid.

²³ For further information on W. R. Rogers see Chapter Four.

²⁴ Allibone, *George Devey*, pp. 56, 167.

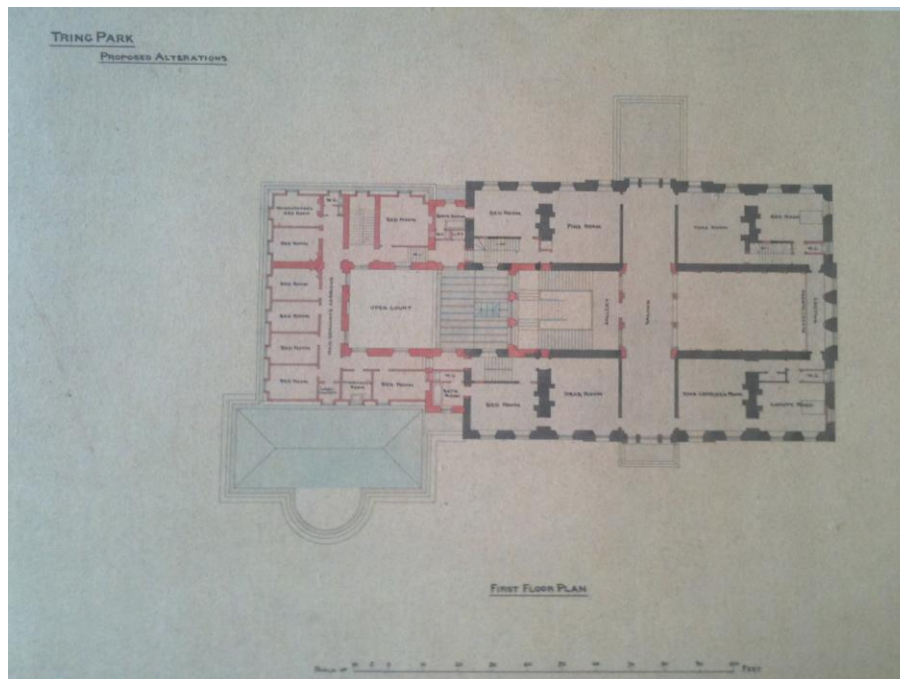


Figure 190: Tring Park House, plan of First Floor, W.R. Rogers, 1885 (Tring Park School)

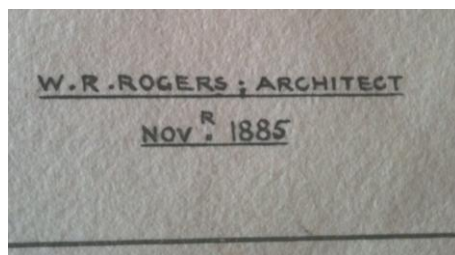


Figure 191: Detail from Tring Park House, plan of First Floor, W.R. Rogers, 1885 (Tring Park School)

Transformation

Notably, Nathaniel not only extended his new residence but also substantially transformed its exterior: the original Wren house was encased externally in red brick, and elaborate stone dressings were added. By the 1880s Tring Park had been transformed into a considerable red-brick house in the eighteenth-century French style, with stone dressings and slate mansard roof. These alterations were undertaken in such earnest that the older structure was almost entirely obscured. In 1880 Young Crawley noted that the house had been 'built in the reign of Charles II', but that now there were 'no external marks of

antiquity'.²⁵ These wholesale alterations gave the mansion the manner of a *dix-huitième* French château. The Château de Dampierre by Mansart for example (c.1675) is of a comparable design.

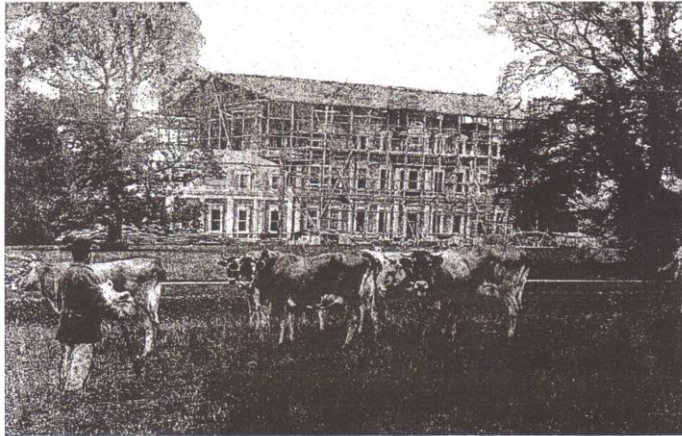


Figure 192: Tring Park House, South Front, the mansion undergoing alterations, c.1880s (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)



Figure 193: Tring Park House, North Front (now the main entrance), c.1903 (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)

²⁵ Young Crawley, *Guide to Hertfordshire: with a history of the various towns and villages, by An Old Inhabitant* (Hertford: Simson & Co., 1880), p. 100.



Figure 194: Tring Park House, South Front, c.1890s (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)



Figure 195: Tring Park House, North Front, c.1884 (NMRC, Buildings File, 032409)



Figure 196: Tring Park House, South Front, 2011



Figure 197: Château de Dampierre

Whether Nathaniel was choosing to disguise the original English architecture of his new residence partly or entirely, the new mansion would not have looked out of place in the French countryside. It was certainly a departure in style from the neo-Elizabethan Mentmore or the original Italianate manner of Aston Clinton. One might ask why Nathaniel chose to adopt this style for his house and not retain its original appearance.

If one were to conclude that Tring Park of the 1880s expressed for the most part the style of the French Renaissance then it might be included in the category of country houses which Mark Girouard has labelled broadly as *nouveau-riche*. Girouard argues that before the mid-nineteenth century the 'new rich who bought country estates were usually anxious to be accepted by their neighbours, and built their houses in the same manner'. He continues by suggesting that after this period however, from about the 1870s onwards, a new style for country house building developed, as a result of a 'shift in the social balance'.²⁶ Perhaps therefore Nathaniel was (either consciously or unconsciously) proclaiming his position as a *nouveau-riche* estate owner through his architectural choices. This *nouveau-riche* style of which Girouard writes is perhaps more clearly evident in the mansion built by Nathaniel's brother Alfred at Halton, begun in 1882 as alterations at Tring were being finalised.²⁷

In addition, and unlike most other *nouveaux riches* of this period, the English Rothschild family had genuine French connections. It is possible that in adopting a French style for his country residence Nathaniel was attempting to illustrate and highlight his family's foreign

²⁶ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 291.

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the '*nouveau-riche*' architectural style in this period see Chapter Four.

connections and educated, well-travelled tastes. Jill Franklin suggests an additional explanation for the French Renaissance style Nathaniel chose, attributing it simply to fashionable taste: she writes that by the mid- to late-nineteenth century 'French renaissance châteaux began to appear in place of classical ones. Characterless old houses could easily be revamped by the addition of high French roofs. It was free from the Christian associations of Gothic'.²⁸ Girouard also considers this factor as important, and notes that at the time of Tring's renovation

it was always tempting for country house owners to remodel completely, particularly if their houses were in the unfashionable manner of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century.²⁹

Interior and plan

Despite the exterior alterations Nathaniel retained the majority of the original seventeenth-century building of Tring Park and its interior plan (simply encasing it) as well as much of its interior features. In 1903 *Country Life* noted that the house had 'undergone many changes since Mr Guy built it', but that it had retained 'many of its old and interesting features'.³⁰ The mansion also retained the basic plan of the original seventeenth-century house, though the functions of certain rooms were altered slightly. Once more the aspect of the approach to the house was altered and the entrance was returned to its original position at the north front and the drive from the town of Tring now opened out into a rectangular gravel carriage sweep at the entrance of the house.

Nathaniel saw the benefits of deliberately retaining certain features of the original house in order to capitalise on its historical associations. Preserving a structure thought to have been built by Wren (and with a connection to Charles II as well as William III) might have been considered an aid in proclaiming a sense of Englishness and gaining assimilation to the landed classes of the Vale of Aylesbury (as may also have been the case for the stylistic choices for Mentmore House and for renovations at Aston Clinton House). Perhaps Nathaniel had in mind the popular convention that the house of a gentleman should be marked by 'elegance and importance without ostentation', and was following the

²⁸ Franklin, *The Gentlemen's Country House & its Plan, 1835-1914*, p. 7.

²⁹ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 7.

³⁰ 'Tring Park, Hertfordshire, the Seat of Lord Rothschild', *Country Life*, XIV (1903), 724-726.

example of his uncle Anthony in attempting to fulfil these criteria and not rebuilding the house with excessive extravagance.³¹ A contemporary publication expressed just such an opinion in 1885:

Tring Park is just within the borders of Herts, and it comes last, and is least on this list of the country seats of the Rothschilds. The head of the firm and family has not yet cared to encumber himself with the greatest nuisance that any man has yet invented for his own discomfort – a tremendous house. He has lived for years in an unpretentious mansion, well situated for him in a delightful part, one hour from Euston Square, and of comparatively moderate size.³²

The choice to retrain the old structure was perhaps also due to the fact that Nathaniel had limited time to spend on his project at Tring, and desired the property be completed as soon as possible in order that he and his young family could spend time there away from London. In addition he inherited a lavish London town house from his father in 1879 and in comparison Tring would remain a country retreat, probably considered and treated as a less luxurious and extravagant destination.

With its intrinsic Wren elements (and the sense that this was once a late-seventeenth-century house built in the classical style) combined with its renovations in the French *dix-huitième* style Tring Park was a transitional house, bridging the gap between the English-style Mentmore of the 1850s and the more confident, extravagant French-style Halton House and Waddesdon Manor of the 1880s. These stylistic differences perhaps reflected the Rothschild family's further rise in status and confidence as the century progressed.

³¹ Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, p.73.

³² H.E., 'Tring Park', *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 11 July 1885, p. 24.

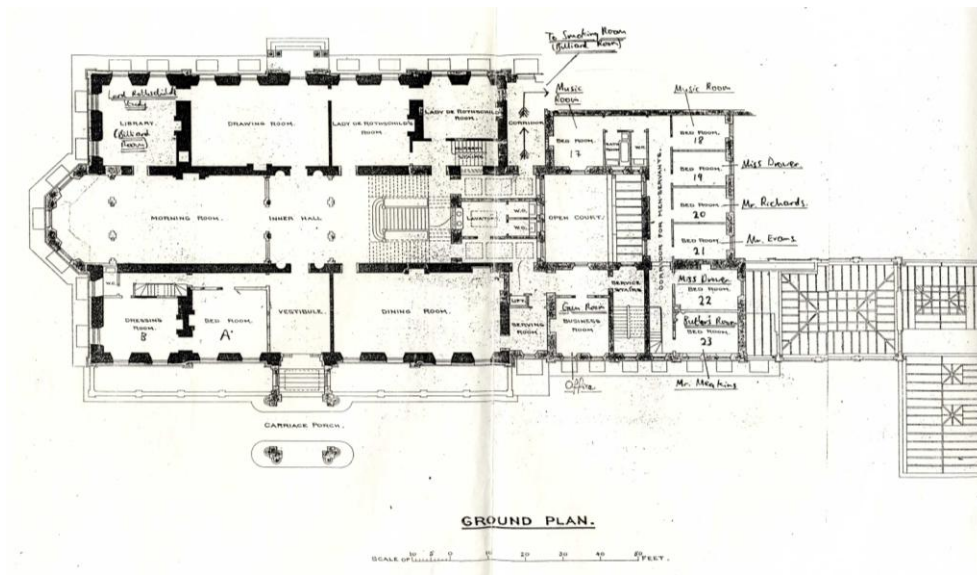


Figure 198: Tring Park House, plan of Ground Floor, date unknown, c.1900 (RAL, 000/379)

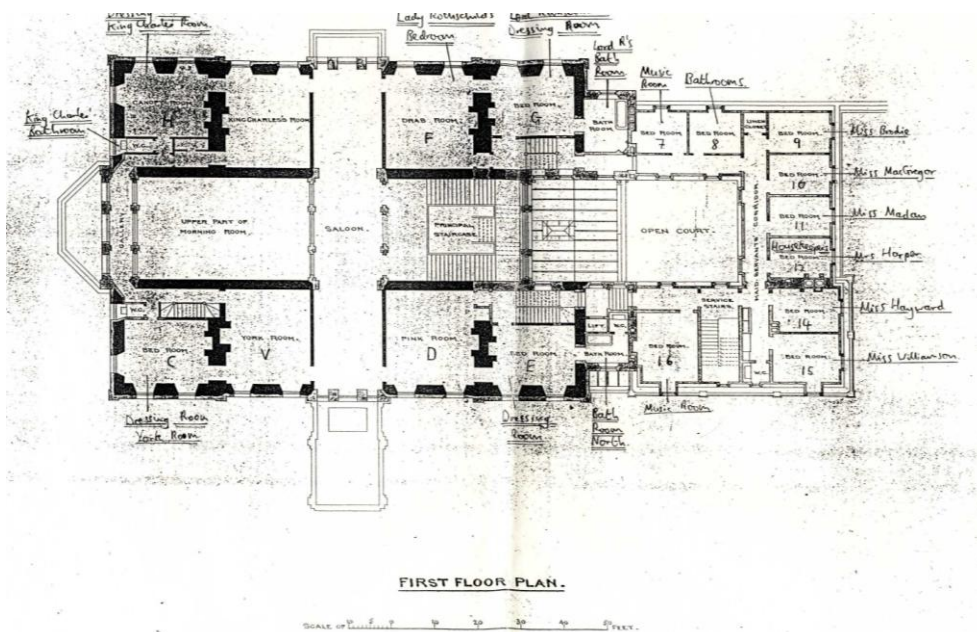


Figure 199: Tring Park House, plan of First Floor, date unknown, c.1900 (RAL, 000/379)

Interiors and collections

Country Life of 1897 was particularly complimentary of the decoration and collections of Tring Park House:

Its [Tring Park] plain exterior does not prepare the visitor for the charms that are found within. They are the charms of noble rooms, beautiful carved woodwork, splendid furniture, historic portraits, pictures by famous masters, enamels, crystals and the finest labour of the most skilled craftsmen. From many sources these beautiful things have come, but they are arranged with the purest taste, and whatever the hands of Art could do has been done for the beautifying of Tring.³³

Staircase Hall and Grand Staircase

A grand and imposing impression was created in Tring Park's entrance hall where dark wood moulded panelling covered every wall and a grand staircase rose to the second floor of the house. This staircase remained true to the original eighteenth-century style of the house (a grand imperial design with two flights) and general style and details (such as the Queen Anne spiralled balusters and staggered treads) made the structure believable as an authentic creation. Nathaniel may have chosen the commanding decorative scheme for this large space in order to impress a sense of magnificence on the visitor. The scheme was also sympathetic to the original appearance of the house when first built, perhaps an attempt by Nathaniel to avoid distancing himself too much from the English character of the residence.

³³ John Leyland, 'Country Homes: Tring Park', *Country Life Illustrated*, I (1897), 604-606.



Figure 200: Tring Park House, Grand Staircase, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

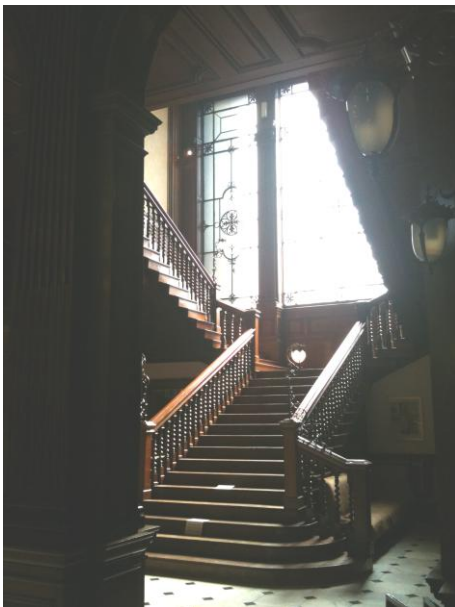


Figure 201: Tring Park House, Grand Staircase, 2011

Six large panels of Gobelins tapestry hung on the upper part of the staircase panelling, adding to the richness of the schemes.³⁴ Four portraits, purchased by Nathaniel, also hung here: two works after Anthony van Dyck (*William Villiers 2nd Viscount Grandison* and *Prince Rupert*) and two by Lucas D'Heere (*Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester* and *Thomas*

³⁴ Illustrating the history of Don Quixote.

Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk).³⁵ These English seventeenth-century works were an unusual choice for a Rothschild family member. Several members of the English Rothschild family admired English eighteenth-century works (usually portraits), yet no other family member collected earlier works such as these. Nathaniel evidently favoured them, reflected in his decision to place them so prominently in his country mansion.³⁶ Perhaps the decision also owed to a desire by Nathaniel to create an interior which recalled elements of the original seventeenth- or eighteenth-century character of the house. Furthermore their presence may have reflected Nathaniel's interest in the historical associations of objects, in this case the sitters of the portraits. This interest and admiration is further supported by the presence of early works depicting famous (and royal) historical figures hung in his private sitting room.

Morning Room

The dark wood panelling scheme of the Staircase Hall was continued into the two-storey great hall (Morning Room) at its east side. Such a room was an unusual feature for a house of the seventeenth century: grand central halls for country houses had largely fallen out of fashion by this time. From about the mid-nineteenth century, however, such a feature enjoyed a revival and several notable new houses began to be designed with grand central halls in their plans, two-storeys high and dominating the centre of the building. It was perhaps a happy coincidence then that Tring Park House already had such a provision when it was purchased by the Rothschild family as it suited their needs well, acting as a grand space for entertaining as well as a family sitting room.

³⁵ RAL 000/848/24, An Inventory of the Furniture, China, Articles of Vertu and Pictures, at Tring Park, Herts, 1903.

³⁶ A taste probably pioneered by Nathaniel de Rothschild's father, Lionel de Rothschild, in the 1860s and 70s, and expanded by his sons in their country houses in the Vale of Aylesbury.



Figure 202: Tring Park House, Morning Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)



Figure 203: Tring Park House, carved cabinets of the Morning Room, 2011



Figure 204: Tring Park House, Morning Room ceiling, 2011

The interior of this room was remodelled to create a grand, luxurious space: dark wood carved panelling, a monumental carved chimneypiece, and dark wood cabinets or bookcases set into the walls created an 'impressive apartment...with rare woods and a wealth of carving for its adornment'.³⁷ The mouldings of the cabinets and the elaborate barrel-vaulted ceiling featured French and Italian Renaissance motifs.³⁸ The use of Italian and French stylistic influences in this room was entirely in keeping with the general tastes of the Rothschild family in the nineteenth century. Such tastes perhaps aimed to emphasise the family's continental links and education. Furthermore these styles were ones which lent themselves most easily to creating magnificent and impressive interiors. Other furnishings and objects of the room matched the extravagance of these features: particularly the use of plate glass in three tall arches at the west end of the room which was a noticeable luxury and an innovation employed to instil a sense of extravagance.

Photographs of 1890 show that a large mirror was placed above the grand dark chimneypiece. Opposite this hung Thomas Gainsborough's *Squire Hallet and his Wife*. By

³⁷ Leyland, 'Country Homes: Tring Park', 604-606.

³⁸ That the cabinets were designed to be integrated into the panelling scheme of the room, and were of such high quality, indicates that they were made by master craftsmen who had the ability to carry out such a scheme. Clarke Andreae has suggested that Charles Mellier of Mellier & Co. may have been responsible for the work and employed expert foreign artisans for such projects. Mellier was a sought-after decorator of the day and he worked for Leopold de Rothschild at his London residence, 5 Hamilton Place, being paid over £16,000 between 1880 and 1882: Andreae, 'A French English Dialogue in Architecture and Interior Decoration from the Mid-Eighteenth Century until the Years between the Great Wars', p. 318.

1903 however the mirror seems to have been replaced with *The Douglas Children* by John Hoppner.³⁹ These were likely to be the only paintings hung in this room due to the presence of so much dark panelling. The English Rothschild family of the nineteenth century displayed a significant interest in English eighteenth-century portraits. Individual family members began buying such works in earnest from the 1870s onwards. Nathaniel's father Lionel had pioneered the taste and had begun buying certain works as early as the 1860; by the end of his life he had purchased a total of 15 examples (including works by Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, George Romney, William Hogarth, Sir William Beechy, Hoppner and Angelica Kauffman). Generally the English works purchased by the family were of women and children, full-length, and always in the sentimental or romantic manner.⁴⁰ They were intended to complement and add elegance and an impression of beauty to the interior schemes at several of the English Rothschilds' residences. Furthermore these works were a safe investment: their provenance and authenticity could be confirmed and the subjects would never be undesirable and remain attractive to most future collectors.⁴¹



Figure 205: John Hoppner, *Portrait of the Douglas Children* (version after the original)

³⁹ RAL 000/848/24, An Inventory of the Furniture, China, Articles of Vertu and Pictures, at Tring Park, Herts, 1903; The Gainsborough work was purchased by Nathaniel de Rothschild in 1884 for £5,250 with the exchange of a painting by Hobbermas: Agnew's Archive, sales ledger No. 4, p. 131, No. 3194; The Hoppner was acquired by Nathaniel de Rothschild for £10,500 with the exchange of two pictures: Agnew's Archive, sales ledger No. 3, p. 10, No. 3389.

⁴⁰ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 296.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 344.

These works were also becoming more readily available on the art market as the aristocracy of this period suffered economic hardship (in part due to agricultural depression), and as a result they became popular items for *nouveau-riche* collectors. The English Rothschild family evidently admired them. Nathaniel was far more enthused with the eighteenth-century English portraits than those of the Dutch and Flemish Old Master schools he had inherited from his father. He expanded and modified the selection of English works that he had inherited (probably around four portraits), swapping some works for others and purchasing some new important paintings.⁴²

Nathaniel divided his entire collection of paintings between his two residences (Tring Park House and 148 Piccadilly, London) preferring to keep his English works in the country, and Dutch and Flemish Old Master works in town. This was perhaps owing to the style he had retained at Tring Park House in its interior decoration, one which was sympathetic to the original eighteenth-century appearance and interior features; presumably he felt his English eighteenth-century works would be better suited to such a setting. In addition this choice reflected a common tendency to divide a collection in order to create a country residence with an 'ancestral' character and a town house which was more formal or traditional. The interest in Dutch and Flemish Old Masters was indeed passing by the mid-nineteenth century, particularly among the wealthy, and Nathaniel seems to have followed this fashion.

⁴² Those he inherited from Lionel de Rothschild included Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Snake in the Grass* (purchased by Lionel in 1871), Thomas Gainsborough's portrait of the *Hon. Frances Duncombe, Master Thomas Richmond Gale Braddyll* by Sir Joshua Reynolds (purchased by Lionel in 1846 for £441), and *Mrs Sheridan* by Thomas Gainsborough (purchased by Lionel in 1872): RAL, 000/848/34, List and notes: pictures at Tring Park, c.1870s.



Figure 206: Thomas Gainsborough, *Hon. Frances Duncombe* (Frick Collection, New York)

Nathaniel also displayed his collection of *Schatzkammer* objects in the Morning Room, a good number of which he had inherited from his father. Two large, specially constructed display cabinets set into the dark panelling scheme of the walls of the room held these objects. Importantly they had been specifically designed for the purpose and gave the collections an elevated status in one of the most public areas of the house. These ‘antique silver and silver-gilt articles’ numbered just over 60, and were composed mainly of German and Italian works of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.⁴³ One notable example of the kind of object displayed here was a German (Augsburg) seventeenth-century silver-gilt model of Diana on a stag which was probably part of a group of 20 similar pieces, made for Emperor Matthias in 1612 upon his coronation.⁴⁴ This collection was comparable to the *Schatzkammer* objects displayed by Nathaniel’s uncle Mayer de Rothschild at Mentmore House, and by his brother Alfred de Rothschild at Halton House. The taste for such objects was evidently inherited, and probably encouraged from an early age: Nathaniel was raised in households where such collections were also on display and afforded special status. In addition Nathaniel, like his father, uncles and brothers, travelled widely throughout his life and must have viewed the collections of his continental relations which contained such items. Nathaniel’s decision to display these works in so prominent a position perhaps

⁴³ RAL 000/848/24, An Inventory of the Furniture, China, Articles of Vertu and Pictures, at Tring Park, Herts, 1903.

⁴⁴ Two others in Lionel’s collection were inherited by Alfred: Hall, ‘The English Rothschilds as Collectors’, 265-285.

indicates they were his most treasured possessions and that he wished to create his own cabinet of curiosities in the princely tradition of the sixteenth-century. The display added magnificence and a sense of affluence to the luxuriously furnished and heavily panelled room: no doubt such a room was created to impress the visitor.

The Morning Room had a wealth of other *objets d'art* on display on tables, cabinets and commodes: these were all of continental manufacture and included decorative clocks and items of porcelain, silver gilt, agate and ivory. All added to the creation of a feeling of opulence and magnificence and were items readily available on the market of the time. In contrast to Mentmore House and Aston Clinton House the majority of the furniture provided for this major reception room was of nineteenth-century date and of an informal type (such as the armchairs, writing desks and reading tables). There were a limited number of French eighteenth-century style items (though records do not indicate whether these were authentic or imitations) but overall period style items were much less evident. Whilst this room was extravagant in its architectural fittings, and was a showcase for Nathaniel's *Schatzkammer* objects, the choice of furniture also reflected its use as an informal living space by the family, achieving a balance between luxury and intimacy.

Drawing Room



Figure 207: Tring Park House, Drawing Room, 2011



Figure 208: Tring Park House, Drawing Room ceiling, 2011

In contrast to the imposing and rather masculine Morning Room, the Drawing Room of Tring Park House was presented in a feminine manner. With its neoclassical ceiling (with painted roundels in the late-eighteenth-century French style and highly decorative gilt decorative details), white marble and ormolu chimneypiece, white and gilt doors, and crimson silk damask on the walls, the room was set firmly in the French eighteenth-century taste. According to an inventory of 1902 in this room were hung just two paintings: one by Joshua Reynolds (*Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*), the other by Jean Baptiste Greuze (*Le Baiser Envoyé*). The Reynolds work was an important painting, and bought by Nathaniel from Agnew's in 1885 for the large sum of £11,000 along with the exchange of two other works.⁴⁵ Its presence again reflected Nathaniel's interest in eighteenth-century English works. Its status and importance were perhaps deliberately highlighted through it being one of only two paintings in the room. *Le Baiser Envoyé* was certainly in keeping with the general decorative scheme of the Drawing Room. It was the only French work listed in the inventory and in fact may have belonged to Nathaniel's brother Alfred who had inherited the work from their father Lionel.⁴⁶ Evidence of French paintings at Tring Park House is sparse, and the works were evidently not to Nathaniel's taste. This contrasted with the tastes of his uncle Mayer at Mentmore and brother Alfred at Halton.

⁴⁵ Agnew's Archive, sales ledger No. 4, p.154, No. 3684; the two other works given in exchange were Sir David Wilkie's *A Pinch of Snuff* and Albert Cuyp *View of the Maas in Winter* bought by Lionel de Rothschild in 1844 from the Coventry House sale; RAL 000/848/23, Pictures at Tring Park, 1902.

⁴⁶ The work appeared in the inventory of 1903, but it was also noted by *The Times* hung at Halton House in 1885: RAL, 000/176/3, List of Property formerly in the possession of Baron Lionel de Rothschild of 148 Piccadilly and now divided by consent of the Baroness Lionel de Rothschild between her three sons Sir N. M. de Rothschild Bart. M.P. Alfred de Rothschild Esq Leopold de Rothschild Esq, March 1882; RAL 000/848/24, An Inventory of the Furniture, China, Articles of Vertu and Pictures, at Tring Park, Herts, 1903; 'A Celebrated Collection', *The Times*, 4 April 1885, p. 8.



Figure 209: Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (Private Collection)

The Drawing Room contained many examples of French eighteenth-century-style furniture, complementing the overall decorative scheme. The presence of so many objects reveals Nathaniel's keen interest in such a style, which followed that of his uncles Mayer and Anthony in their country mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury. *Objets d'art* also filled this room in abundance and were of continental manufacture: items of glass, ormolu, Sèvres china, agate, marble and Limoges enamel further enhanced the opulence of the furniture and decorative schemes. Certain items of furniture reflected a common Rothschild interest in creating lavish cabinet displays: several contained 'valuable curios', one showcased Limoges enamel objects, and another silver-gilt objects. Nathaniel's father Lionel had acquired a variety of silver and silver-gilt German and Italian *Schatzkammer* works as a result of his marriage to Charlotte von Rothschild (1819-1884) in 1836: Charlotte had inherited the objects from her father, Carl von Rothschild (1788-1855) of Naples. A good number of these works had been in turn inherited by Nathaniel from his parents and he chose to display them at Tring Park in the Drawing Room and Morning Room. The works must have added a sense of magnificence to an already impressive interior.

Lord Rothschild's Sitting Room

In May 1889 Nathaniel acquired two important sixteenth-century portraits of *Queen Elizabeth I* and *Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester* from Agnew's, both attributed to Nicholas Hilliard. These hung in Lord Rothschild's Sitting Room in 1902 and a photograph of c.1890

taken by Bedford Lemere captures the former work here. It was also described by Young Crawley in his *Guide to Hertfordshire* of 1880, though he mistakenly stated that it was a copy of a work by Zuccaro:

and one of Queen Elizabeth, which has been much spoken of; it is thought to be a copy from the celebrated picture by Zuccherro [sic] (which Horace Walpole speaks of) at Hampton Court. The Queen is represented with her hand on the head of a stag; and in the corner, some fanciful poetry is written, which it is presumed was thought to be suitable to her peculiar taste.⁴⁷

John Leyland of *Country Life* also reported that he saw the portrait in 1897, referring to it as 'remarkable'.⁴⁸ A portrait of *Isabella Clara Eugenia Infanta of Spain* by the Spanish Alonso Sanchez Coello hung alongside and complemented these works.



Figure 210: Tring Park House, Library/Lord Rothschild's Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

⁴⁷ Crawley, *Guide to Hertfordshire: a concise history of the county*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Leyland, 'Country Homes: Tring Park', 604-606.

Lady Rothschild's Room and Boudoir



Figure 211: Tring Park House, Lady Rothschild's Room/Boudoir, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

The style of the ceilings and other architectural features of these rooms were firmly in the neoclassical feminine taste, and reflected their use by Nathaniel's wife, Emma Louise Rothschild (1844-1935). The original eighteenth-century ceilings and chimneypieces, which featured figures and motifs recalling Louis XIII Renaissance and Rococo elements, were preserved.⁴⁹ This was perhaps a deliberate attempt to retain some of the original interior character of the mansion. The rooms were lined with green silk and provided with luxurious furnishings.⁵⁰

As was the case for many other rooms of the mansion, the French-style decorative scheme of the room was completed with French eighteenth-century-style furniture and rich continental *object d'art* which created a sense of splendour. Paintings listed as hung in this room in 1902 were various, and probably owed to the private tastes of Nathaniel's wife. Notable objects included two contemporary portraits: *The Honourable Walter Rothschild* by Walter Oules and *Portrait of Lord Rothschild* by George F. Watts. Both were

⁴⁹ It is probable that the ceilings were executed by the architect James Gibbs (1682-1754) for William Gore the younger (d. 1739) sometime in the early-eighteenth century.

⁵⁰ RAL 000/848/24, An Inventory of the Furniture, China, Articles of Vertu and Pictures, at Tring Park, Herts, 1903.

commissioned in the 1880s and were personal, commemorative family portraits rather than evidence of the Rothschild family's wish to collect contemporary art: indeed this was not an area of the art market which generally interested any nineteenth-century English Rothschild family member. Yet in choosing to employ the most renowned artists of this period for these commissions Nathaniel was showing he could afford the best and commission leading figures.

Dining Room



Figure 212: Tring Park House, Dining Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)



Figure 213: Tring Park House, Dining Room, 2011

The Dining Room of Tring Park House was decorated in a similar feminine manner to the Drawing Room and Boudoir. The impressive and heavily moulded ceiling featured a 'frieze of Italian design' and a red marble chimneypiece stood out against the room's pale

coloured walls.⁵¹ Both the Dining Room and Drawing Room recalled the classical style, probably a tribute both to the original character of the rooms, and also a reflection of their function as feminine spaces, or light, open reception rooms for sophisticated entertainment. The contrast between the feminine areas of the mansion (the Drawing Room, the Boudoir and Lady Rothschild's Room) presented in the French Rocco-revival or classical style, and the Italian dark oak panelling or leather of the Morning Room, Grand Staircase and Lord Rothschild's Room was stark. This was a pattern repeated at Mentmore House.

The paintings which were chosen to hang in the Dining Room were all English eighteenth-century portraits: three by Joshua Reynolds (*Master Thomas Richmond Gale Braddyll*; *The Braddyll Family*; and *Mrs Lloyd*) and two by Thomas Gainsborough (*Mrs Sheridan*; and *Ladies Marsham and their brother the honourable Charles Marsham 2nd Earl Romney*).⁵² Three of these works (*Mrs Sheridan*, *Mrs Lloyd* and *Master Thomas Richmond Gale Braddyll*) had been inherited by Nathaniel from his father. The decision to display such grand eighteenth-century portraits in this room further reveals Nathaniel's interest in this school of painting, one he inherited from his father. It also created a very particular statement in a room where entertainment was provided for guests: here Nathaniel publicly displayed portraits of eighteenth-century aristocratic figures, works which were highly desirable in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is also probable that in their sentimental nature and subject matter (depicting women and children or families) the portraits not only complemented the classical-style moulded ceiling and French eighteenth-century-style furniture, but also reflected the use of Tring Park as a family home.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Purchased in 1846 (by Lionel de Rothschild for £441), 1891 (by Nathaniel de Rothschild), 1869 (by Lionel), 1872 (by Lionel) and 1888 (by Nathaniel) respectively: RAL, 000/848/34, List and notes: pictures at Tring Park, c.1870s.



Figure 214: Thomas Gainsborough, *Mrs Sheridan* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC)



Figure 215: Thomas Gainsborough, *The Morning Walk: Mr and Mrs William Hallett* (National Gallery, London)



Figure 216: Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Braddyll Family* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)

Billiard Room or Smoking Room

The Billiard Room (Smoking Room) was probably intended as a sitting room or study for the male members of Nathaniel's family and his guests. The carved woodwork partly installed on its walls was in keeping with the decorative scheme of the Grand Staircase and Morning Room and reflected the use of the room as a masculine area of the house. The large white marble reliefs featuring classical-style figures which were interspersed with the panelling, however, created an unusual and overpowering decorative scheme (some figures recognisable as mythological figures such as Cupid and Psyche or Bacchus). Over the large chimneypiece was an elaborate marble overmantel, described by Nikolaus Pevsner as the 'prow of a ship with life-size female figures'. In its 1897 article *Country Life* attributed the marble reliefs to a G. A. Storey.⁵³ George Adolphus Storey (1834-1919) was registered as a student at the Royal Academy in 1853 and later become a senior member and Professor. Puzzlingly, however, G. A. Storey, R. A. was a painter. The *Country Life* author mistakenly named G. A. Storey as the creator of these marbles when in fact the sculptor Thomas Waldo Storey was responsible for them. Indeed Nikolaus Pevsner noted the overmantel was signed 'W. S., Rome 1889'.⁵⁴ T. W. Storey was an American sculptor working from Rome and was later commissioned to design large garden fountains for

⁵³ Leyland, 'Country Homes: Tring Park', 604-606.

⁵⁴ *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p. 369.

Leopold de Rothschild at Ascott and for Viscount Astor at nearby Cliveden. Clarke Andreae suggests that the marble scheme is based on a similar design of 1804 for the Hall of Mars in the royal Palace of Caserta, Naples, by Valerio Villareale (with Claude Monti and Domenico Massucci).⁵⁵ Andreae feels Storey would probably have been familiar with the design (which was itself inspired by rooms at Versailles).⁵⁶

We will never know why exactly Nathaniel chose to create such an effect for his Billiard Room. It has been suggested that marble was a more suitable wall 'hanging' than fabrics for such a room in which there would be a good deal of smoking. The scheme may also have been intended to emphasise Nathaniel's appreciation of classical learning, and harmonise with the original eighteenth-century date of the mansion. It may also have been Nathaniel's wish to highlight his continental taste and connections through such an interior. The scheme furthermore was dramatic and impressive, emphasising his affluence and the luxury he provided in his mansion.



Figure 217: Tring Park House, Billiard Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

⁵⁵ This Palace was built in the eighteenth century for the Bourbon kings of Naples and was completed by 1780.

⁵⁶ Andreae, 'A French English Dialogue in Architecture and Interior Decoration from the Mid-Eighteenth Century until the Years between the Great Wars', p. 319.



Figure 218: Tring Park House, marble work of the Billiard Room, chimney piece and Victory, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)



Figure 219: Tring Park House, marble work of the Billiard Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)



Figure 220: Tring Park House, Billiard Room, 2011



Figure 221: Tring Park House, Hall of Mars in the Royal Palace at Casserta, la Sala di Marzo

Interiors and collections: conclusion

Overall the interiors of Tring Park House once again reveal the English Rothschild family's tendency to present a number of different and eclectic styles in one residence. Several major rooms of the mansion recalled the original eighteenth-century character of the house and were lavishly presented in a somewhat masculine character with dark wood panelling and elements of the Renaissance style. Other rooms were renovated with an emphasis on

the neoclassical style, sometimes even the French Rococo-style, and were presented in a more elegant, feminine manner.

In addition to extending Tring Park mansion and renovating its interior, Nathaniel also modified the exterior of his residence: the original Wren-style house was transformed into a red-brick eighteenth-century French style mansion, with stone dressings and slate mansard roof. As has also been discussed this renovation perhaps owed to Nathaniel's wish to revamp his home in the latest fashionable style, and highlight his continental connections and education. In addition the French eighteenth-century style was one associated with the *nouveaux riches* of this period. This French eighteenth-century style was also frequently employed in the interiors of the mansion, both in its fittings and furnishings and through the furniture and *objets d'art* which Nathaniel chose to display here. The French eighteenth-century character of Tring Park, both of the exterior and interior, was however less extravagant than later Rothschild houses in the Vale (such as Halton House and Waddesdon Manor). This was somewhat of a transitional house therefore: its transformation into a continental château was not wholesale. The evidence compiled in this chapter reveals that Nathaniel retained certain interior features of the original eighteenth-century Wren-style house and also displayed many English eighteenth-century portraits here. This was perhaps in order to maintain an association with the original English character of the house and avoid creating a wholesale impression of Rothschild 'otherness' in the Vale of Aylesbury.

It is also possible that the eclectic nature of the interiors of Tring Park House owed much to the need for convenience, and resulted from the intended use of the mansion. The mansion was a family home for Nathaniel, his wife and their young children: it was intended to be a residence where the family enjoyed leisure time away from London and the demanding Rothschild banking business.⁵⁷ The more relaxed and informal nature of the mansion (expressed most particularly in the quantity of informal nineteenth-century furniture kept here) reflected this.

Yet the interiors of Tring Park House were still presented in an opulent manner: as in all other Rothschild mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury the house contained much furniture in the style of the French eighteenth-century (both authentic and imitation) and many *objets*

⁵⁷ As head of the Rothschild bank from 1879.

d'art of continental workmanship. Sometimes these were French eighteenth-century in date and sometimes curios or precious objects of the Renaissance, all of which added further splendour to the interiors of the mansion. These items complemented certain decorative schemes and were objects which Nathaniel had inherited, which his relatives also collected, and which he continued to favour. Such schemes also reveal Tring Park's function as an entertainment venue in which Nathaniel could host friends, political allies, and business associates in a sumptuous countryside location. Nathaniel must have wanted his mansion to reflect his strong social and financial position, and the decorative schemes he created aided in this: owning the finest objects, which were of fashionable continental taste, emphasised Nathaniel's affluence, his educated tastes, and his European connections.

Certain aspects of Nathaniel's collections revealed the tendency for Rothschild family members' tastes to be continued through a number of generations. Nathaniel's father and uncles (as well as his many Rothschild relations in continental Europe) had maintained a preference for decorative schemes in the French eighteenth-century or Italian Renaissance styles in their residences since the mid-nineteenth century. Lionel bequeathed much eighteenth-century French-style furniture and continental *Schatzkammer* objects to his sons. In addition Nathaniel's avoidance of Italian or Spanish paintings in his collecting activities reveals a common Rothschild inclination.⁵⁸ Certain of Nathaniel's preferences in collecting and display also show that tastes among English Rothschild family members could change over time, and alter slightly between individuals. French eighteenth-century paintings collected by Nathaniel's father and uncle Mayer were evidently not to Nathaniel's taste. Furthermore he was not enthusiastic about the Dutch and Flemish schools of painting. Finally Nathaniel continued and further expanded the early interest his father showed in English eighteenth-century portraits.

Contemporary reception

Few contemporary accounts of Tring Park survive. Excepting Young Crawley's basic description of the house of 1880, the only other sources surviving are two *Country Life*

⁵⁸ This largely owed to the fact that such works could have a Christian subject matter and it was difficult to be sure of their authenticity.

articles of 1897 and 1903, both of which were complimentary of the new house.⁵⁹ The author of the earlier article was impressed with the work undertaken by Nathaniel and provided a positive assessment, though without reference to the building's now French character:

the mansion has gone through some changes, and is a pleasant place to look upon when you approach it from the thriving village of Tring, by the beautiful carriage drive, and find it disclosed amid the noble trees that embower it; more charming still when you behold it across the great sweep of the park beyond. A massive building of red brick, with stone quoins and window-dressings and pilasters running up its frontage to the crowing balustrade, and a great porte cochère, beneath which you drive – such is the character of the house.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Crawley, *Guide to Hertfordshire*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ Leyland, 'Country Homes: Tring Park', 604-606.

Chapter Eleven

Halton House

The Halton estate in the Vale of Aylesbury was acquired by the Rothschild family in 1853. This chapter will show that the acquisition of the estate at this time owed to the Rothschild family's wish to amass more land in the Vale of Aylesbury, and own a number of contiguous estates. It will also be demonstrated that the use of the estate by Alfred de Rothschild (1842-1918), and his construction of a large, striking mansion here in the 1880s was motivated by his specific circumstances, (including the accommodation of his collections of art and furniture), and his outgoing personality. It will be argued that Alfred's actions were not primarily motivated by a wish to 'gentrify' himself and mask his *nouveau-riche* background. The French Renaissance style of Halton House, one which was closely associated with nineteenth-century *nouveaux riches*, will also be explored: Alfred's decision to create such an overt statement of his wealth and extravagance in the Vale of Aylesbury will be examined.

The interiors of Alfred's mansion matched the flamboyance of the exterior and were generally sumptuous and luxurious, intended to impress and display Alfred's wealth and taste in art objects. The overall emphasis was on the French Rococo-revival style: most rooms were filled with heavy, decorative draperies and tapestries; French eighteenth-century-style architectural features and fittings; eighteenth-century furniture with ebony, marquetry, gilt or tapestry; and decorative art objects of continental manufacture.

Describing the construction of Halton House, Alfred's cousin Constance, Lady Battersea, reported that he instructed his architects to build a house 'in which certain art treasures might be displayed to the best possible advantage'.¹ This chapter will illustrate that the residence was indeed presented in a particular luxurious and opulent way in order to provide a suitable setting for Alfred's existing and growing collections of paintings, furniture and *objets d'art*. An analysis of the interior decoration of the mansion makes it clear that it was predominantly intended as a venue in which Alfred could lavishly entertain his many guests, and exhibit his ever-growing collections. It will be shown that certain aspects of Alfred's collecting preferences remained within the boundaries of traditional Rothschild taste, as established by his father and uncles, but others were more progressive.

¹ British Library, Add. MS. 47913, fos. 412-13, Diaries of Lady Battersea 1858-1928.



Figure 222: Halton House, West Front, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)

The Halton estate 1720-1853

The earliest record of the Halton estate dates to the latter part of the tenth century, at this time it was in the possession of the monastery of Christchurch, Canterbury. Many subsequent owners followed and by the late-sixteenth century the estate was in the possession of the Fermor family. In 1720 it was purchased from James Fermor by Sir Francis Dashwood (1658-1724) for £19,000.² Dashwood owned a good deal of the surrounding estates, his family seat was the nearby West Wycombe Park. At this time the Halton estate comprised around 1,500 acres of farm land and a modest Palladian-style manor house or 'squire's home' was situated in the village of Halton.³ The estate passed through the Dashwood family and when Sir John Dashwood-King, 4th Baronet gave up West Wycombe Park in 1815 to his son George Dashwood he retired to the smaller estate of Halton, establishing himself in the house.⁴ Sir John suffered from crippling debts and upon his death in 1849 his son inherited well over £10,000 of debts and was eager to sell off certain of his lands.⁵ The Halton estate was amongst those he offered for sale and the Rothschild family were eager to buy.

² 'Parishes: Halton', *The Victoria History of the County of Buckingham*, ed. by Page, II, pp. 339-341.

³ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 14.

⁴ Sir John Dashwood-King, 3rd Baronet permitted the Grand Junction Canal to pass through the Halton estate, which was of considerable financial benefit; Sir John Priest, *General View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire* (R. Phillips, 1813).

⁵ These debts largely owed to the mismanagement of his estates; RAL, 000/681, Conveyance of land, Sir G. H. Dashwood to Baron L. N. De Rothschild, 24 June 1853; RAL, 000/69/2, bundle 9, Bond of indemnity and for quiet enjoyment, Sir G. H. Dashwood Bart. to Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, 24 June 1853.

It was Lionel de Rothschild who was responsible for the purchase of the estate by the Rothschild family. The negotiations for the purchase were lengthy, but Lionel finally settled at £47,500 in June 1853.⁶ Lionel's brother Nathaniel wrote to him when the sale was confirmed: 'I congratulate you my Ld of Halton'.⁷ By the time of the purchase of the Halton estate Lionel had already established a country residence at Gunnersbury Park, and also kept a sumptuous London house. He was therefore less inclined than his brothers to establish an additional country residence at this time and the Halton estate and existing manor house were not inhabited by him, or indeed any of the family at this time.

By 1880 however the situation changed as the third generation of the English Rothschild family reached its maturity in the Vale of Aylesbury. Upon the deaths of Mayer in 1874, Anthony in 1876, and Lionel in 1879 the estates which the Rothschild family had so far purchased in the Vale fell to the next generation of family members. These individuals continued to develop their presence and influence in the area, as well as the estates and properties which they owned. At Mentmore in 1874 Mayer's daughter Hannah (Countess of Rosebery upon her marriage in 1878) inherited the grand Mentmore House as well as numerous other land holdings in the Vale. In about the same year Lionel's eldest son, Nathaniel, established his household on the Tring Park estate and began extensive alterations to the mansion. The same was true of the Aston Clinton estate which after 1879 was the home of Anthony's daughters Constance and Annie. This generational change was also now the case for the Halton estate when in 1879 Lionel's second son, Alfred, inherited it.⁸ As discussed previously, Lionel ensured that each of his sons were provided with an estate of their own in the Vale of Aylesbury after his death. As part of this scheme Halton fell to Alfred.⁹ By the time Alfred inherited it the estate covered approximately 1,500 acres and boasted many tenant farmers, the village of Halton, and much agricultural land.

⁶ CBS, D-D/2/58, Correspondence regarding sale of Halton estate by Sir George Dashwood to Baron de Rothschild, 1851-4; RAL, H&J, L.18, Abstract of title of Mr Lionel de Rothschild to hereditaments forming part of the Halton Estate in the County of Buckingham, 30 September 1879.

⁷ RAL, XI/109/77/2, Nathaniel de Rothschild to his brothers, Paris, 19 November 1850.

⁸ Lionel's youngest son Leopold was also not overlooked and inherited the Ascott estate (see Chapter Thirteen).

⁹ RAL, H&J/J.36, Draft Deed of Partition of Estates Held by Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, 30 September 1879: Includes details of the division of his lands at Halton, Aston Clinton, Buckland, Ascott, Wing, Linslade, Drayton Beauchamp, Marsworth, Cheddington, and Pitstone between his three sons.

In a similar way to his uncle Mayer, Alfred embarked upon a large project to construct a brand new and impressive mansion house at Halton. The site chosen was about half a mile from the village, on a hilltop commanding views of the surrounding area.

The style of Halton House

Alfred chose a style for his new house which evoked seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French Renaissance châteaux. A striking three-storey mansion, Halton House was built of brick, faced with white sandstone with a lead and slate French-style pavilion roof. Pinnacles and chimney stacks of various heights punctuated the turret-tops and roof-tops.¹⁰ A tall circular tower (the Belvedere) rose from the roof and acted as a viewing platform and additional roof-top decoration. A turret featured at each of the four corners of the house and an impressive *porte cochère* was built at the South Front. Oonagh Kennedy notes that the mansion 'with an exterior in full French *dix-septième* style', had 'strong resemblances' to the Château Maisons-Laffitte, Paris, a monumental château designed by François Mansart (1598-1666) from 1630-1651 and a prime example of French baroque architecture.¹¹ Beryl Escott of RAF Halton is correct when she asserts Alfred had 'requested a French château modelled on modern English lines', but which also had 'touches of Italian Palaces as well as elements drawn from Scottish classical and eastern architecture'. The photographer and designer Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) nicknamed the style of architecture expressed by Halton the Rothschild 'Grand French manner'.

¹⁰ Escott, *The Story of Halton House*, p. 34.

¹¹ Kennedy, 'The success of excess: aspects of Englishness in some of the Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury', p. 74-77.



Figure 223: Halton House, South or Entrance Front, c.1888 (RAL, 000/887)



Figure 224: Halton House, West Front, J. Thompson, c.1880s (NMRC)



Figure 225: Halton House, North or Garden Front, J. Thompson, c.1880s (NMRC)



Figure 226: Château Maisons-Laffitte

Alfred chose William Rogers (or 'Rodriguez') of the London firm William Cubitt & Co. as his architect. Alfred appeared pleased with his choice of architect, later presenting him with a commemorative album containing photographs of the finished house.¹²

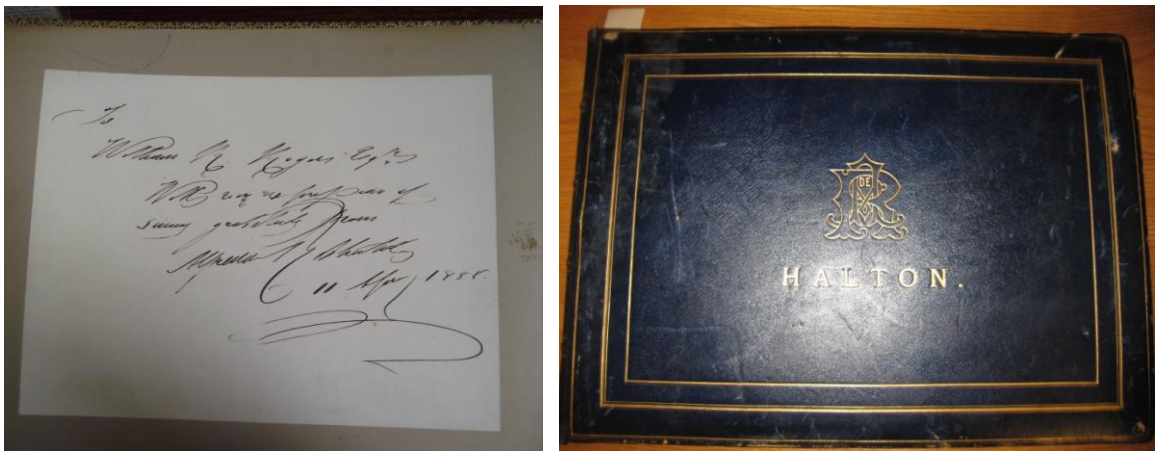


Figure 227: Halton House Album, c.1888, inscribed 'To William R Rogers Esq.' (RAF Halton Archive)

Nikolaus Pevsner has noted that Halton House was 'an ambitious mansion'.¹³ The style Alfred chose for it was not one which had featured much before in the landscape of the Vale of Aylesbury and was rather a departure in attitude from the Rothschild properties at Aston Clinton and Tring Park (and indeed in style from Mentmore House). Though these former two mansions were by no means modest in size, Anthony and Nathaniel had at

¹² RAF Halton Museum, Halton House Album, c. 1888. Inscribed 'To William R. Rogers Esq with every expression of sincere gratitude. From Alfred de Rothschild 11 May 1888'.

¹³ *Buildings of England: BE 19, Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p. 364.

least retained the old houses and renovated them, and not considered building brand new residences. Alfred's scheme for a new mansion at Halton was therefore much closer to that of his uncle Mayer at Mentmore (though of course the two mansions were built in very different architectural styles).

Alfred certainly had the confidence and social position to create a mansion in the Vale of Aylesbury which was such a statement of his position as a *nouveau-riche* estate owner. Adam believes that Alfred deliberately chose it in order to be 'as elaborate and showy as possible'.¹⁴ The style and statement reflected Alfred's personality; it also reflected the growth in confidence of the third generation of Rothschild family members. Beginning with the French-inspired changes at Tring Park enacted by the same architect for Alfred's brother Nathaniel, the Rothschild family members in the Vale of Aylesbury were confident enough to assert their presence and position as *nouveau-riche* landowners through their architectural choices. This had perhaps been less the case for Mentmore House where an English style prevailed, and at Aston Clinton House, which not only retained its vernacular character but was much less ostentatious.

Of course there were other styles which Alfred could have chosen for his mansion which may have created a gesture of flamboyance: however Franklin's assertion that the French Renaissance style was 'free from the Christian associations of Gothic' is probably correct, and must have been a consideration in the choice.¹⁵ In addition the style may have been a deliberate choice in order to proclaim the Rothschilds' continental links and unique position as a truly European family.

Many authors have suggested Alfred intended Halton House to compete with his cousin Ferdinand de Rothschild's new property at Waddesdon, also built in the *dix-huitième* style.¹⁶ Allibone suggests that Halton was built 'in emulation of Waddesdon' and was 'meant to compete' with it.¹⁷ Indeed Ferdinand's bachelor quarters were finished in 1880, just as Halton House was begun. Caution must be applied when applying this conclusion however as no documentary evidence exists to support this hypothesis: Alfred never discussed his reasons for building Halton House, or the choice of style. If we consider

¹⁴ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 30.

¹⁵ Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House & its Plan*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', 80-83; Prevost-Marcilhacy, *Les Rothschilds: Batisseurs et Mecenes*, p. 172-3.

¹⁷ Allibone, 'Escaping the City: The Rothschilds in the Vale of Aylesbury', 80-83.

Alfred's general competitive and flamboyant personality however it is likely that this motive played a large part in the building of the house.

Interiors and collections

Alfred became known during his lifetime as one of the finest judges of eighteenth-century French paintings, as well as a connoisseur of English and Dutch works. Through this reputation he was often influential in the art world of the nineteenth century in Britain: he secured a position as a Trustee of the National Gallery in 1892 and also of the Wallace Collection in 1897.¹⁸ Alfred's collections were recognised generally (and quite publicly) to be significant in their size and magnificence: *The Times* of 1885 found the catalogue of the collection which Alfred commissioned to be 'probably the most sumptuous catalogue of works of art that has ever been compiled'.¹⁹ Constance, Lady Battersea stated that 'the collection of pictures and *objets d'art* to which he [Alfred] was continually adding, was, I believe, unique.'²⁰ It is unclear why she deemed the collection 'unique' but it is possible that she was commenting on its sheer size and opulence. As has been noted in previous chapters the collecting of the type of objects Alfred admired was neither unique to the Rothschild family, nor to collecting in general in the nineteenth century.

Halton House itself often received a mixed reception. In 1903 an author of *Country Life* was complimentary and remarked that the mansion was 'a treasure house of art, standing on the same level as that which possesses the famous Wallace collection in London.'²¹ Yet such a 'treasure house' was not to everyone's taste: aristocratic society figure Lady Frances Balfour wrote 'Oh but the hideousness of the thing, the showiness! The sense of lavish wealth, thrust up your nose!...Eye hath not seen nor pen can write the ghastly coarseness of the sight.'²² It is possible that her comments reflected a certain prejudice against newly wealthy men and their tendency to display their affluence in such a way as Alfred did.

¹⁸ In addition Alfred de Rothschild sometimes supplemented government grants so that paintings he considered important should end up in national collections.

¹⁹ 'A Celebrated Collection', *The Times*, 4 April 1888, p. 8.

²⁰ Battersea, *Reminiscences*, p. 42.

²¹ 'Tring Park, Hertfordshire, the Seat of Lord Rothschild', *Country Life*, XIV (1903), 724-726.

²² Lady Frances Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris, Dinna Forget* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 221. Frances Balfour was the wife of Colonel Eustace James Anthony Balfour (1854-1911) who was the brother of Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930), Prime Minister 1902-5.

Salon and Staircase

The magnificent two-storey Salon at the centre of the ground floor of Halton House was intended to impress. Fibrous plaster reproductions of Rococo *boiseries* lined almost every available wall; this delicate yet imposing scheme was heavily gilded. As Clarke Andreae notes, the panels recalled the style and effect of those of the Cabinet de Conseil at Versailles.²³ The opulent decorative scheme was continued with a magnificent chandelier below a glass skylight, lavish silk curtains at the room's four entrances, and an enormous Persian carpet which covered almost the entire floor. This room overtly and extravagantly evoked the styles of eighteenth-century France and the French Rococo, matching with the architectural style Alfred had chosen for the exterior of the mansion. Its impact upon visitors and guests as the main reception room must have been significant. From the outset Alfred was revealing his taste for this style, and his ability to recreate it so lavishly. The choice was almost certainly motivated by his wish to entertain in luxurious surroundings: it is probable he thought the fashionable elegance and opulence created by a Rococo interior best enabled him to do so.

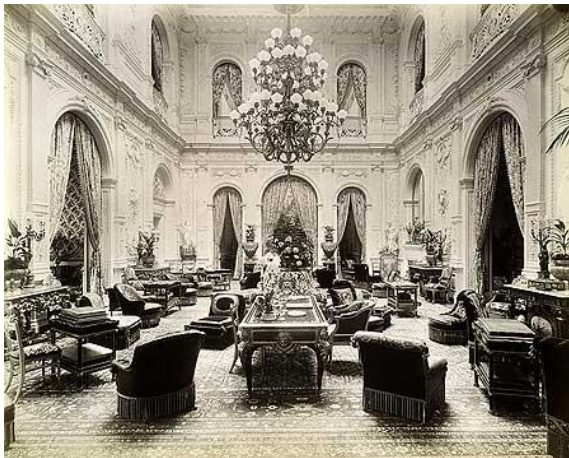


Figure 228: Halton House, Salon, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)

²³ Andreae, 'A French English Dialogue in Architecture and Interior Decoration from the Mid-Eighteenth Century until the Years between the Great Wars', p.359.



Figure 229: Halton House, fibrous plaster trophied panels of Salon, 2011



Figure 230: Halton House, Salon glass dome and belvedere tower (Escott, *The Story of Halton House: Country Home of Alfred de Rothschild*)



Figure 231: Halton House, Salon chandelier, 2011



Figure 232: *Cabinet de Conseil*, Versailles

The use of plaster reproduction panels in the place of authentic *boiseries* in this room is a reminder that, unlike at Mentmore House or Waddesdon Manor, Alfred did not see the need to use original eighteenth-century panelling and fittings as his uncle and cousin had done. The extent to which Alfred chose to imitate and reproduce fixtures and fittings with modern materials is revealed in the staircase which led from the Salon: the black and gold balustrade, whilst appearing to be made of iron, was in fact made of plaster. It is possible that time considerations dictated Alfred's choice in all this: perhaps he could not wait for authentic objects to come to the market and be altered for installation, or perhaps there

were simply no suitable objects available at the time he wished to create such a decorative scheme (likely to have been in the early 1890s). Perhaps also Alfred was not willing to spend exorbitant amounts on the objects: Halton House was after all a residence used for only part of the year, and even then only at weekends. By the time Alfred was considering installing eighteenth-century decorative panelling in his mansion such objects were highly desirable to collectors all over Europe and America so competition was rife and they reached high prices. Alfred's cousin Ferdinand wrote in December 1874 that there were

plenty of pretty decorative articles about if one chooses to pay for them. I saw a very pretty Louis XVI mantelpiece for which I offered five thousand francs and which Gustav bought five minutes afterwards for twelve.²⁴

The firm responsible for much of the interior work of the Salon is likely to have been G. Jackson and Sons.²⁵ This firm also worked on interiors at Aston Clinton House and Mentmore House and have also been credited with work for the London residences of Alfred's father and brother Leopold.²⁶ Evidently different members of the Rothschild family liked to employ the same craftsmen on their projects.

The use of reproduction mouldings and panelling was not therefore an undertaking unique to Halton House; other members of Alfred's family had already installed such schemes in their homes, as indeed had many other Englishmen: in the 1830s and 40s the 2nd Earl de Grey had the *boiseries* he had designed for the schemes at Wrest Park executed in plaster. Victorian advances in technology in the nineteenth century made it possible to recreate decorative architectural fittings in plaster to much less expense, and on a scale to keep up with demand.

The panelling and other decorative mouldings of the walls of the Salon at Halton House precluded the display of paintings.²⁷ Photographs of 1892 along with an inventory taken at Alfred's death reveal that there was, however, a great deal of furniture provided for this

²⁴ Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 100.

²⁵ In a letter dated 1885 to his wife Adele, Carl Meyer noted that 'the house itself seems now really complete and even Jackson cannot discover anything more to alter – much to his dismay': Collection of Dr Tessa Murdoch, Carl Meyer, Halton Tring, to Adele Meyer, 3 April 1885; Several receipts relating to work carried out by the firm for Alfred appear amongst his private receipts.

²⁶ RAL, XII/41/8, Lionel de Rothschild receipted accounts, 1852-1879; RAL, XII/41/5/3, Mayer de Rothschild receipted accounts, 1856-1873.

²⁷ Although before the panelling had been fitted (in around 1890) the panels featured Spitalfields silk damask panels upon which hung four works by François Boucher.

room, creating an interior which was both busy and sumptuous. Tables and cabinets were generally ornate, with ormolu and marquetry details. There were suites of French eighteenth-century chairs and settees, some with Gobelins or Aubusson tapestry coverings. In addition a gilt four-seater ottoman stood at the centre of the room and there were a good number of easy armchairs or occasional chairs for general use, reflecting the mansion's function as a venue for social gatherings.

Bronze candelabra, decorative French clocks and Sèvres porcelain completed the French Rococo scheme of the room. It is clear that Alfred greatly admired eighteenth-century porcelain. He had inherited a full Sèvres service and an additional 15 vases from his father. He further added to this during his lifetime so that this part of his collection grew to over 60 objects, 14 pieces of Sèvres-mounted furniture and six full services.²⁸ Alongside these Sèvres objects in the Salon could be seen many eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain objects (including cisterns, jars and vases). Some of these were mounted with eighteenth-century-style ormolu plinths and handles. The objects were highly decorative and ornate and therefore matched the decorative schemes of both houses well, further emphasising the luxury and wonder of the interiors. The two largest vases of this type in Alfred's collection stood facing the stairs, not to be missed by any visitor entering the Salon from this direction.

²⁸ RAL 000/174B/19, Alfred de Rothschild receipted accounts: The sum of £7,500 for a lot of Sevres vases, 11 July 1888; Two services had French Royal provenances: Hall, 'The English Rothschilds as Collectors', 265-285; see A. Dawson, 'The Eden Service: Another Diplomatic Gift', *Apollo*, CXI (April 1980), 287-297; Michael Hall, 'The Chartres-Forth Service: Philippe Egalite's Lavish Gift', *Apollo*, CXXIII (June 1986), 386-389.



Figure 233: Halton House, Staircase, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 234: Halton House, Staircase with Chinese vases, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 235: Garniture of five Rose du Barry Sèvres vases, of Louis XV shape (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 236: Garniture of three bleu turquin Sèvres vases and a pair of jardinière, with paintings after Wouvermans (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

The Staircase itself was as sumptuously decorated as the Salon with Persian carpets and a large Beauvais tapestry by Neilson. In a similar way to Mentmore House it is made clear through the placement of this latter object that Halton House was designed with Alfred's collection in mind: the plasterwork of the staircase wall was obviously designed to accomodate particular tapestry as the top of the two side panels features a canopy which imitates the pavilion seen in the design of the tapestry.²⁹

²⁹ Escott, *The Story of Halton House*, p. 79.

Drawing Rooms

The North and South Drawing Rooms of Halton House were decorated and furnished almost identically: both had a largely feminine Rococo flavour. This style was in keeping with that established in the Saloon and continued the French eighteenth-century sumptuousness. Whilst decorated in the same style, one was intended for female family and guests (North) and one for male family and guests (South). This provision of separate spaces for male and female groups was a common feature of all Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury: at Halton however it was slightly unusual to find them furnished in exactly the same way. The highly decorative Rococo ceilings and marble chimneypieces were complemented by elaborate eighteenth-century-style soft furnishings and both rooms featured much French furniture (some objects of genuine eighteenth-century date). Often these featured gilt, marquetry or tapestry panels and added to the opulence of the decorative schemes. In addition a large number of nineteenth-century easy or occasional chairs and side tables were scattered around the rooms to be used more regularly. Again, as in the Salon, in both drawing rooms were many examples of Sèvres porcelain, ornate clocks, and Chinese porcelain from Alfred's collections, creating further richness.



Figure 237: Louis XVI secretaire inlaid with a Sèvres plaque, signed 'd'après F. Boucher, Dodin en 1783', cabinet work listed as by Riesener and metal-work by Gouthière (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

South Drawing Room



Figure 228: Halton House, South Drawing Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)

Along with the great number and variety of French eighteenth-century decorative arts which were on show in this room were two open cabinets which displayed a multitude of items in the tradition of the *Schatzkammer*. These included for example silver gilt chalices, drinking cups, salt cellars, goblets, tazze, figures, carved ivory groups and tankards, jade objects, rock crystal objects and Venetian glass objects. Many of these items had been inherited by Alfred from his father Lionel. The collection was as a result comparable to that displayed at Tring Park House by Alfred's brother Nathaniel. The inherited taste for such objects is evident. That Alfred chose (like his brother) to show his collection in a public room, in specific display cases which gave the objects a unique status, reveals his interest in such a collection. As has been discussed this sort of *Schatzkammer* arrangement was also present at Mentmore House, and in numerous other Rothschild houses in this period: it was certainly a taste Alfred shared with his relatives.



Figure 239: 'Henri II ware' candlestick (C. Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, 2 vols [London, 1885], II)

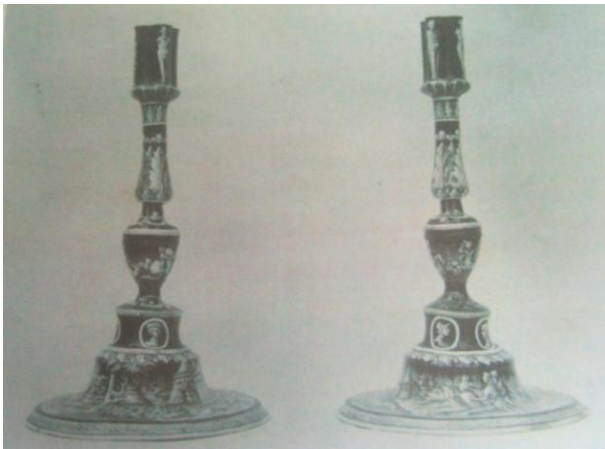


Figure 240: Pair of Limoges enamel candlesticks (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 241: Three pairs of silver-gilt cups, German seventeenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

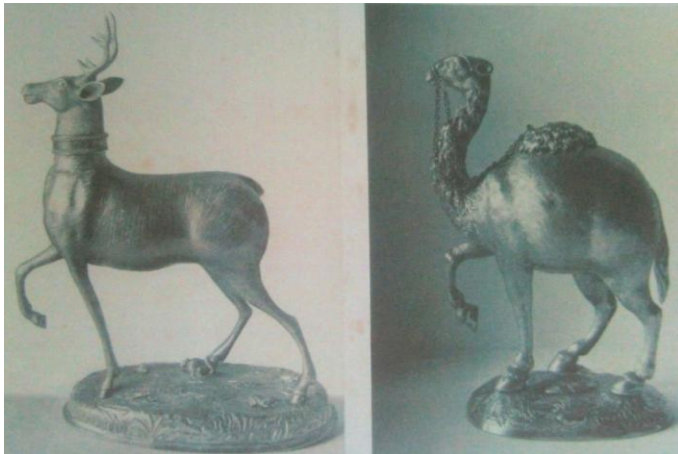


Figure 242: Silver gilt stag and camel, German early-seventeenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

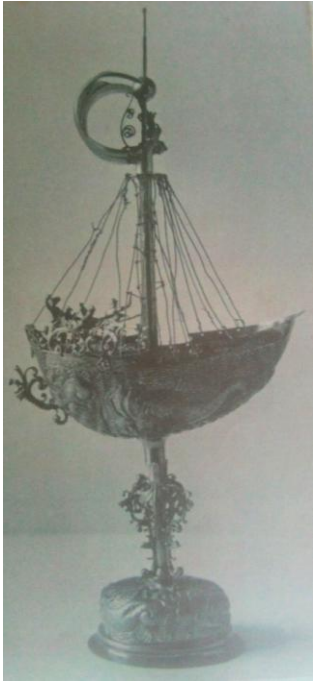


Figure 243: A silver-gilt Nef, German sixteenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild, II*)



Figure 244: Silver-gilt figure of Diana seated on a stag, sixteenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild, II*)



Figure 245: Silver-gilt figure of St George and the Dragon, Augsburg (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild, II*)

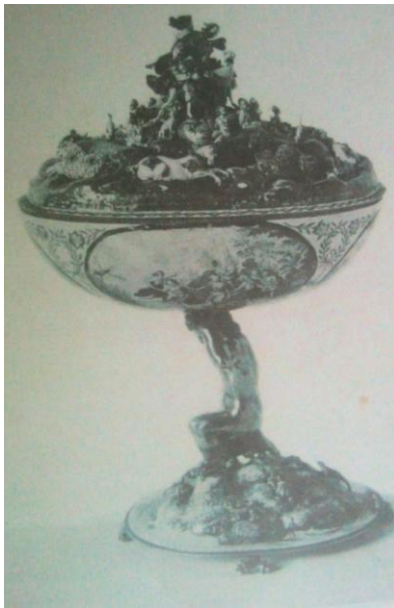


Figure 246: Orpheus cup, sixteenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild, II*)

The choice of paintings for this room also reveals that whilst Alfred retained many of the same tastes as his father, he also expanded into new avenues of collecting, perhaps influenced by fashion and his desire for glamour and luxury in his mansion. On one hand

the South Drawing Room contained around 10 Dutch or Flemish Old Master works (including examples by Paulus Potter, Adam Pynaker, Adriaen van de Velde and Philips Wouverman) which were generally small scale cabinet paintings. Alfred admired the Dutch and Flemish schools and spent much money on acquiring these works for Halton House. His taste for them had begun early and he had in fact been influential in constructing his father's collection.³⁰ From his father Alfred inherited about 30 Dutch or Flemish works by 18 separate great masters and to this he continued to add high quality genre works or land and seascapes dating to the mid- to late-seventeenth century. By Alfred's death Halton House contained around 60 works by Dutch and Flemish artists of the seventeenth-century, a vast number. The works were predominantly displayed in the main rooms of the house where Alfred entertained his guests and so publicly revealed his tastes for these works. The choice of these formal and rather sedate works however is surprising when the more flamboyant decorative scheme of this room, and indeed the entire mansion, is considered. Such works were not found at other Rothschild residences in the Vale of Aylesbury such as Mentmore House, Aston Clinton House and Tring Park House. These works did however lie within the traditional tastes of the Rothschild family and an interest in them had been formed in the 1850s and 1860s by Alfred's father Lionel.³¹ This perhaps explains their presence, and Alfred's interest in them. Furthermore these works probably aided Alfred in constructing his reputation as a serious connoisseur, proving his ability to identify the finest Old Master works in a area of collecting previously monopolised by the aristocracy.

³⁰ Certain of Lionel de Rothschild's receipts for Dutch or Flemish works are in Alfred de Rothschild's name, but the objects were purchased with Lionel's money for Gunnersbury Park or 148 Piccadilly, London: RAL, XII/41/8, Lionel de Rothschild receipted accounts, 1852-1879.

³¹ RAL 000/174, List of pictures in the possession of Alfred de Rothschild being part of the collection formed by Mr Alexander Baring, no date.



Figure 247: Pieter de Hooch, *Two Men Drinking/A Dutch Courtyard* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 248: Gaspar Netscher, *Lady at her Toilet/Lady in Cream and Blue Satin Dress* [Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 249: Paulus Potter, *Castle and Homestead/The Water Mill* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

On the other hand the Dutch and Flemish Old Master works were juxtaposed in this room with around 10 French eighteenth-century paintings (including examples by Nicolas Lancret, Jean-Baptiste Pater and Antoine Watteau). Alfred also admired these works and built up a large collection for Halton House: they matched his 'flamboyant and slightly risqué personality'.³² By his death he owned 52 eighteenth-century French paintings which he had purchased from the 1880s onwards (some kept at Halton House and some in his London residence). He was particularly enamoured of works by François Boucher and Jean-Baptiste Greuze, amassing more works by the former than any other English collector (apart from the 4th Marquess of Hertford and Richard Wallace). Most of the French works Alfred chose were small genre scenes or portraits, often of a sentimental type; the subject matter was invariably female, and could sometimes be rather risqué for the time.³³

³² Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 60.

³³ Certain Boucher works (*Triumph of Venus*, *Toilet of Venus*, *Cupid Disarmed by Venus*, and *Venus Caressing Cupid*) were hung in the Salon until about 1890, the latter two in ornate frames; The Lancret works included *The Minuet*, *Garden Scene*, *Skating Party*, *Garden Scene with Figures*, *River View* and *French Garden Scene*; Watteau: *Buildings Garden Scene and Figures*, *Garden Scene with Fountain and Figures*, and *La Fontaine*; the works by Pater included *La Danse*, *Peace*, *War*, *Plaisirs Champêtres*, *Repos dans le Parc*, *Les Amants Heureux*, *Landscape and Figures*, two *Garden Scene and Figures*, and two *Landscape and Figures*; works by Drouais included the so-called *Portrait of Mademoiselle Dutet*, bought by Agnew's for Alfred at the San Donato sale in 1880 (as a pair with Gainsborough's *Mrs Philip Thickness*); the Raoux work was *Madame Elizabeth*; and the Greuze was *Portrait of a Polish Woman*. *Mademoiselle Dutet*: as Hall identifies the sitter was only seven when Drouais died, recent cleaning has revealed that the head has been re-painted, and an inscription identifies the sitter as Mlle Louise Manthion de Fourqueux: Hall, 'The English Rothschilds as Collectors', in *The Rothschilds: A European Family*, ed. by Heuberger, 265-285; Many of these French works



Figure 250: Nicolas Lancret, *The Minuet* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 251: Antoine Watteau, *La Fontaine* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

came to Alfred from the sale of the collection of the Earl of Lonsdale in 1885: See RAL 000/174B/15, Alfred de Rothschild receipted accounts: Trustees of the will of the late Earl of Lonsdale, 20 June 1885.



Figure 252: Sir Thomas Lawrence *Lady Mary Templeton and her Eldest Son* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

The works complemented the ornate Rococo luxury of the decoration of many rooms at Halton House, and corresponded with the French eighteenth-century objects and furniture Alfred filled the rooms. Alfred's strong penchant for French works of the eighteenth century is noteworthy: it shows he had moved beyond the early tastes of his father for Greuze (and who in fact lay more within Lionel's taste for Dutch works) and began to collect more flamboyant and decorative works. The market for such works at the time Alfred was collecting was also growing, furthermore his uncle Mayer at Mentmore (and several of his cousins on the continent) had been enthusiastically purchasing these items from the 1850s onwards also.³⁴

North Drawing Room

The North Drawing Room was also provided with certain Dutch Old Master works (two examples by Aelbert Cyup and two by Jan Van Huysum). These were also accompanied by works of other schools, English as well as French eighteenth-century paintings. Works by Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds and George Romney (4 in total) hung here:

³⁴ For example his French cousins Mayer Alphonse James Rothschild (1827-1905), Gustave Samuel de Rothschild (1829-1911), Edmond Benjamin James de Rothschild (1845-1934).

all were sentimental and glamorous portraits of beautiful women.³⁵ Alfred's love of English eighteenth-century portraits is evident: he followed the tastes of his father and brother Nathaniel and further developed his own collection of such works. These paintings, generally of the period 1760-1790, were available but in high demand at the time Alfred was collecting, and he often paid high prices for them. Their decorative nature complemented the lavish French Rococo interior of the North Drawing Room and were perfect accessories for the fashionable and glamorous interiors which Alfred was attempting to create in his country residence.



Figure 253: Halton House, North Drawing Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)

³⁵ They included *Mary Isabella Duchess of Rutland* by Reynolds (purchased from the sitter's nephew the 8th Duke of Beaufort in 1881), *Mrs Villebois* and *Mrs Meares* by Gainsborough (from Henry Villebois in 1886 for £10,000: RAL 000/174B, Alfred de Rothschild receipted accounts: Henry Villebois for two Gainsborough pictures of Mrs Villebois and Mrs Meares, £10,000, 10 March 1886).



Figure 254: Halton House, North Drawing Room chimneypiece, 2011



Figure 255: Halton House, North Drawing Room doors, 2011



Figure 256: Jan van Huysum, a pair of still lifes (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 257: George Romney, *Lady Webster*, later *Lady Vassall-Howard* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

As in the South Drawing Room, certain French eighteenth-century works were also on display (namely three sentimental, decorative works by Pater). Unusually a work by Domenichino (*Magdalen*) was also hung in this room. An Italian work, of a religious nature, was a particularly unusual choice for Alfred's collection. However, if it is considered simply

as a portrait of a beautiful female figure it no doubt assisted in creating a sense of feminine glamour that Alfred desired.



Figure 258: Domenichino, *Magdalen Wearing a Blue Gown over a Red Dress* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 259: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *La Danse* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

Boudoir



Figure 260: Halton House, Boudoir, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 261: Halton House, Boudoir chimneypiece, 2011

The overall effect created in the Boudoir at Halton House was one of eighteenth-century elegance: an appropriate style for a feminine space. The parquet floor, gold damask walls and elaborate white and gold Rococo ceiling created a magnificent effect, further enhanced by turquoise and pink furnishings and ornate eighteenth-century French style

furniture. Certain objects revealed Alfred's desire to collect items of historical interest, in particular relating to the *Ancien Régime*. Alfred shared this taste with his uncle Mayer at Mentmore House and it appears to have been a preoccupation of many Rothschild family members. Here for example was a marble and metal chimneypiece, which supposedly came from the Petit Trianon, and a cabinet (possibly by Adam Weisweiler) rumoured to have been made for Marie Antoinette.³⁶ Once again the room contained ornate French eighteenth-century clocks, gilt candelabras and ornamental porcelain (much of the Chelsea, Dresden and Sèvres type), all objects which added to the rich decorative scheme.

As in the North and South Drawing Rooms paintings on display in the Boudoir included sedate Dutch Old Master works (works by Ludolf Backhuysen, Cuyp, Jan van der Heyden, Jan Steen and David Teniers for example), combined with French eighteenth-century works of a more sentimental nature (by Jean Germain Drouais, Lancret, and Pater) and certain large and glamorous English eighteenth-century portraits (by John Hoppner, Gainsborough, Reynolds and Romney). The latter group must have created a sense of drama and opulence in this very public room.³⁷

³⁶ A. Pradere, *French Furniture Makers: the art of the Ebeniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 389-98.

³⁷ They included Romney's *Mrs Ticknell* (purchased from Agnew's, collection of J. H. Anderson Esq. for £840 in 1879: RAL 000/174B/11, Alfred de Rothschild receipted accounts: Thomas Agnew and Sons, picture by George Romney 'Mrs Ticknell'), *Lady Webster, later Lady Vassall-Howard* (from Agnews, Lord Vassell-Holland collection in 1883) and *Lady Hamilton Dressed as Circe* (from the daughters of Joshua Jonathan Smith, an Alderman of London and friend of Lady Hamilton), Gainsborough's *Anne Ford Mrs Thickness* (from Agnews in 1884), Hoppner's *Mary, Duchess of Gloucester* and Reynolds' *Miss Angelo*.



Figure 262: George Romney, Mrs Ticknell (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 263: Thomas Gainsborough, *Anne Ford Mrs Thickness* (Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio)

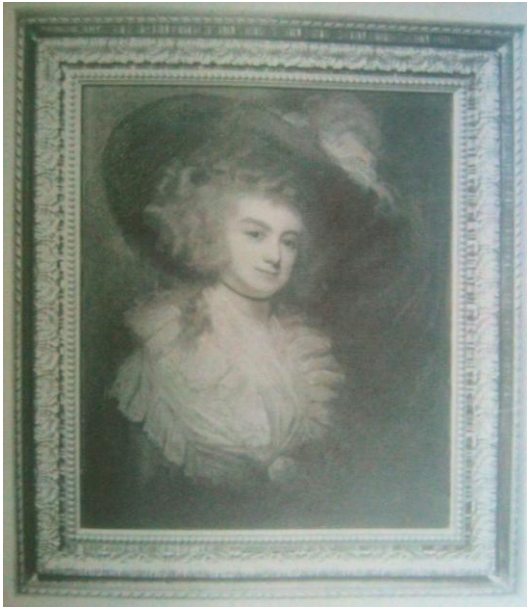


Figure 264: Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Miss Angelo* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 265: Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Baizer d'Envoyer* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 266: François-Hubert Drouais, *Portrait of Mademoiselle Dutet* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

Dining Room

The Dining Room of Halton House was decorated in a style in keeping with that of the two drawing rooms, though it was much the more ornate room. Its walls, lined with decorative white plaster-work panels featured raised gilt details. The opulent panelling was further enhanced with a large chandelier, white marble chimneypiece, grand mirrors and many candelabra. The French Rococo extravagance of the decorative scheme was intended to impress guests dining in luxury. The panelling prevented many paintings from being hung here: just one large and imposing portrait by Reynolds (*Lady Bamfylde*) dominated the west wall.³⁸ Alfred's admiration for this work is evident when we consider the room was later named the Bamfylde Room.

³⁸ Purchased from her descendent Lord Pollitmore in 1884 for £15,000: RAL 000/174B, Alfred de Rothschild receipted accounts: Lord Pollitmore, portrait of Lady Bamfylde, £15,000, 1884.

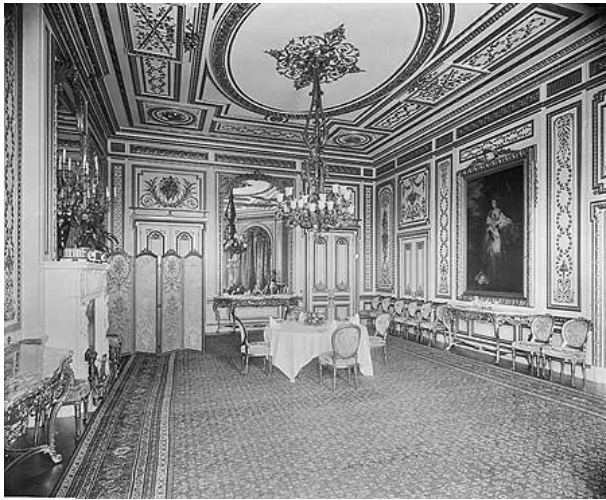


Figure 267: Halton House, Dining Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 268: Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Lady Bamfylde* (Tate Britain, London)

Mr Rothschild's Room or Red Room

The Red Room was smaller than many others of the ground floor. It showed comparative simplicity in decoration and a departure from the French Rococo style so much employed elsewhere (despite its Rococo chimneypiece). This is revealing: the room, with its neoclassical interior and gilded Italian Renaissance ceiling, was a private retreat and as Alfred's inner sanctum was decorated in a refined and learned style. In the public rooms of the house Alfred had created sumptuous, fashionable and extravagant interiors to be

enjoyed by his guests, something he did not see as necessary in his private business room.³⁹ In a similar way Italian Renaissance-style decorative schemes, which often created more masculine interiors, had been employed in certain rooms at Mentmore House.



Figure 269: Halton House, Mr Rothschild's Room, J. Thompson, c.1880 (NMRC)



Figure 270: Louis XVI ormolu clock, the dial inscribed 'Lépine, Place des Victoires, No.12' (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

The large, centrally-placed desk revealed the room's main function and here Alfred surrounded himself with his most favoured works of art. As elsewhere in the mansion

³⁹ The room was also an almost exact replica of Alfred's study at Seamore Place, London.

these included French eighteenth-century items of furniture (often with marquetry, ormolu or Sèvres details), Sèvres vases, ornate clocks and marble sculptures. Paintings on display were once again a mixture of Dutch Old Master works (by Nicolaes Berghem and Teniers), English eighteenth century portraits (three by Romney) and French eighteenth-century works (by Boucher and Phillippe de Champaigne).⁴⁰



Figure 271: George Romney, *Lady Katherine Paulett* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

⁴⁰ Those by Romney included *Lady Katherine Paulett* (purchased from her son the 4th Duke of Cleveland in 1884), and *Lady Hamilton in Morning Dress* (from the Tankerville-Chamberlayne collection).



Figure 272: Philippe de Champaigne, *Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu* (National Gallery, London)

Library

The Library was decorated in much the same way as the Red Room, but this time the colour scheme was gold. This was also a room used more privately by Alfred, and not intended as a major entertainment space.⁴¹ Therefore the paintings on display perhaps reveal Alfred's most intimate tastes. This was undoubtedly for the Dutch and Flemish school: around 20 works by artists such as Ludolf Backhuysen, Nicolaes Berghem, Cuyp, Jan van der Heyden, Pieter de Hooch, Frans van Mieris, Teniers and Wouvermans hung here. These were invariably small cabinet pictures depicting genre scenes or landscapes. This room also acted as a location for more of Alfred's *Schatzkammer* objects: a tall display cabinet in the centre of one wall displayed various rock-crystal objects, nautilus cups, silver gilt cups, tankards and ornate salt cellars, most of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century in date and of German manufacture. Here in his library Alfred combined Old Master paintings and precious objects to create a collector's sanctum, away from the other more public rooms of the house, in a particularly traditional and princely fashion. Alfred

⁴¹ Escott, *The Story of Halton House*, p. 85.

also reserved two portraits of *Lady Hamilton* and that of *Lady Paulette* in his collection for his Red Room.⁴²



Figure 273: Halton House, Library, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 274: Gerard ter Borch, *A Lady Singing/Guitar Lesson* (C. Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, 2 vols [London, 1885], I)

⁴² *Lady Hamilton* was purchased by Alfred from the daughters of Joshua Jonathan Smith, an Alderman of London and friend of Lady Hamilton



Figure 275: Jan Wynants, *A Hawking Party/Landscape, Figures and Hawks* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 276: Adriaen van de Velde, *Piping Herdsman* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 277: Isaac van Ostade, *The Fruit Stall* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 278: Jacob van Ruysdael, *Landscape* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 279: Jan Steen, *Village Wedding* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)



Figure 280: George Romney: *Lady Hamilton in Morning Dress*



Figure 281: A Louis XVI bronze and ormolu clock, the dial inscribed 'Lepaute, H du Roi' (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 282: German seventeenth-century silver-gilt model of a tripping stag by Balthasar Lerff I, first quarter of the seventeenth century (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Magnificent Silver-gilt, Objects of Vertue and Miniatures from the Rothschild and Rosebery Collection, Mentmore* [1999])



Figure 283: German seventeenth-century silver-gilt model of a tripping stag by Christoph Erhalt, c.1600 (*Sotheby's Auction Catalogue, Magnificent Silver-gilt, Objects of Vertue and Miniatures from the Rothschild and Rosebery Collection, Mentmore* [1999])



Figure 284: Louis XV tortoiseshell and ormolu casket (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild, II*)



Figure 285: David Teniers, *Village Feast* (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, I)

Billiard Room

The Billiard Room at Halton House was designed specifically for the game and as a 'male sanctum to retire to'. Mark Girouard has described this room as 'splendidly *Louis Seize*'.⁴³ Ornamental polished wood wall panelling, gilt edged doors and decorative plasterwork (with symbols of the arts and sciences), a Palladian-style moulded and gilded ceiling and a large white marble chimneypiece created extravagance and Rococo excess. These elaborate architectural features were the main focus of the room but to accompany the opulent effect were gilt and marquetry items of furniture and a good number and variety of flamboyant continental *objets d'art*. The display of Anthony van Dyck's portrait of the *Duchess of Richmond in Satin with Cupids* and Jean Raoux's *Madame Elizabeth* in this room was in keeping with Alfred's acquisition of glamorous female portraits.

⁴³ Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 291.



Figure 286: Halton House, Billiard Room, c.1888 (RAL, 000/887)



Figure 287: Halton House, Billiard Room, 2011



Figure 288: Ivory cup and cover, Flemish seventeenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 289: Ivory statuettes, Italian seventeenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 290: Rock crystal vase, Italian sixteenth-century (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 291: Rock crystal vases (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

Smoking Room

An essential gentleman's sanctum for any country house, Alfred's Smoking Room was decorated in a lavish Moorish style, with elaborate gilded details. This theatricality and eastern style decoration was fashionable in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century and houses of this period frequently featured such rooms decorated in the Moorish, Alhambra or Indian style. The solid 25-carat gold gilding of the chamber was reported to have originally cost £25,000; if true this was a huge sum to have spent on such decoration.⁴⁴ Gold hangings on the walls, brass-panelled folding doors, a Moorish-style hanging light and large

⁴⁴ Escott, *The Story of Halton House*, p. 85.

fireplace all added to the opulence and Moorish feel of the room. Again the room was intended to impress, and set the scene for opulent entertainment.



Figure 292: Halton House, Smoking Room, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1892 (NMRC)



Figure 293: Louis XV ormolu and white marble clock and a pair of Louis XVI ormolu candelabras (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 294: A Louis XVI enamelled gold snuff box (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)



Figure 295: A Sèvres bonbonniere, with paintings after Boucher (Davis, *A Description of the Works of Art Forming the Collection of Alfred de Rothschild*, II)

A work by Bronzino (*Young Italian Nobleman*) and one by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (*St Joseph and the Infant Child*) were on display. The former work seems to have been admired so much by Alfred that the room came to be known as the Bronzino Room. The presence of these two works, not generally collected by Rothschild family members and lying far from traditional tastes of the family, can be explained if we consider that this room was unlike any other at Halton House and its decoration as well as choice of paintings reflected this. These two paintings complemented its rich and exotic appearance and once more aimed to illustrate Alfred's connoisseurship of Old Master works. The walls of this room were lined with Italian sixteenth-century circular shields and other mixed pieces of armour, as well as a few guns and pistols. As Gerald Reitlinger notes by the nineteenth century 'armour had already been part of the standard wealthy decor for a whole

generation', yet he adds that until the last few decades of the century armour did not appeal to the 'self-made or ancestorless man'.⁴⁵ Indeed collections of arms and armour were not frequently found in Rothschild residences. The presence of such objects in Alfred's collection probably owes to his desire to create a particularly masculine and exotic interior in this room. Such objects were found in the collections of comparable individuals such as Sir Richard Wallace in this period; Alfred was acquainted with Wallace and may have been influenced by him in his acquisition of arms and armour.⁴⁶

Interiors and collections: conclusion

Halton House was not the family home that Tring Park House or Aston Clinton House were. Alfred had free rein to create a particular image of his wealth (and himself) through his country mansion in the Vale of Aylesbury. He was a younger son and independently wealthy, furthermore he was friends with many powerful society figures. The mansion was designed as the ultimate entertainment venue: its theatricality, gilded and glittering interior reflected this function. The decorative marble, mirrors, *boiseries* and textiles of the interiors created a certain atmosphere of wealth and opulence, firmly setting the Rothschild name in the context of eighteenth-century luxury. The furnishing of Alfred's mansion matched the flamboyance of his personality: he liked nothing more than to entertain and exhibit his good taste and wealth with great splendour. His sexuality (Alfred was generally suspected of being gay) is also reflected in the aesthetic choices he made and was reflected in many of his most flamboyant tastes. Alfred desired that the interior of his new house express his showiness and affluence, as the exterior did. The rich and expensive objects he collected enhanced the magnificence of the interiors, and highlighted his wealth and connoisseurship.

The interior of Alfred's mansion exclusively employed the French Rococo style in all public rooms: he evidently believed that the grand Francophile style, with its ostentation and luxury was the ideal style to employ in his interiors, one he felt best lent itself to sumptuous entertaining. Halton House was intended as a showcase for Alfred's collections of objects and furniture, which were rich and various, and which he wished others to view. These

⁴⁵ Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: Volume II The Rise and Fall of Objets d'art Prices Since 1750* (London: Barrie and Rockliffe, 1961), p. 106.

⁴⁶ See Chapter Seven for a more detailed discussion of the collections belonging to Sir Richard Wallace.

interiors combined with the *nouveau-riche* architecture of the exterior made the mansion a carefully managed exercise in conspicuous consumption.

Alfred's tastes were largely defined before he began building his country mansion, which he filled with a great number of objects he had acquired before it was built. Furthermore these were objects that were readily available on the art market or popular with collectors of the period. A large amount of Alfred's collecting activities were derived from tastes which he had inherited from his father and relatives, such as an interest in Old Master Dutch and Flemish cabinet paintings which he hung in both public and more private spaces. The display of *Schatzkammer* objects in the South Drawing Room and Library of Halton House once again owed much to such inherited tastes. An interest in historical items was also common to many Rothschild family members.

Alfred did not simply stay within the boundaries of collecting set by his father and relatives however: he also expanded certain interests and even moved far beyond them. Alfred's evident attraction to English eighteenth-century portraits is seen at Halton House, where beautiful women set against romantic landscapes added further glamour to the interiors he had created. In addition in the collecting of French eighteenth-century paintings Alfred moved beyond his father's limited interest in works by Greuze and joined his uncle Mayer in acquiring a great number of works by other eighteenth-century artists. There is evidence to confirm that Alfred continued to collect items for his mansion throughout his life, most of which lay within the canons of taste he had already established.

Contemporary reception

As Halton House was such an overt statement of ostentation, of foreign influence, and *nouveau-riche* wealth one might ask how the house was received by contemporaries at the time of its completion. Upon the occasion of its opening by the Prince of Wales in 1885 the *Bucks Herald* reported that the 'imposing mansion in white stone'

adds another to the many palatial homes of the Rothschilds in Bucks, and must now be numbered as one of the most imposing of them...a vast expenditure having been made with regard to the furniture and appointments, in addition to a lavish

outlay on the building itself. The Mansion and its surroundings are truly of a princely character.⁴⁷

Country Life also provided a positive description of the house, declaring it had

a great and imposing edifice, with something of the stately air of a French chateau, embodying in its architecture the pleasing characters of classical grace and modern elegance. The house, unlike some that have been treated in these pages, has not grown through the centuries. It is a veritable creation, and its author may feel justly proud of his work.⁴⁸

A few years later the same publication asserted that 'Mr Alfred de Rothschild's glorious place in the immediate neighbourhood' was 'one of the most splendid modern mansions in England'.⁴⁹ In the early part of the twentieth century G. F. M. Cornwallis-West (1835-1919), a regular visitor to Halton, reiterated such a view by recalling Halton was 'more than a house, it was a palace'.⁵⁰

Yet the mansion was not to everyone's taste. Some contemporaries found it much too grandiose and showy. A Rothschild cousin described it as resembling a 'giant wedding cake' and Sir Algernon West proclaimed it 'an exaggerated nightmare of gorgeousness and senseless and ill-applied magnificence'.⁵¹ Perhaps the most derisive comment was that made by Lady Frances Balfour, the daughter of the 8th Duke of Argyll:

I have seldom seen anything more terribly vulgar. It is a large house holding about 25 guests. Outside it is a combination of a French chateau and a gambling house. Inside it is badly planned and gaudily decorated. There is a large central hall going through two stories...Large as the house is this is the only room with any pretence to grandeur of dimensions...Oh! But the hideousness of everything, the showiness! The sense of lavish wealth thrust up your nose! The coarse mouldings, the heavy

⁴⁷ 'Royal Visit to Halton', *Bucks Herald*, 19 January 1884.

⁴⁸ 'Country Homes: Halton', *Country Life Illustrated*, I (1897), 664-666.

⁴⁹ 'Tring Park, Hertfordshire, the Seat of Lord Rothschild', *Country Life*, XIV (1903), 724-726.

⁵⁰ G. M. F. Cornwallis-West, *Victorian Hey-Days* (London: Putnam, 1930), p. 135.

⁵¹ Sir Algernon West, *Private Diaries* (London, 1922), 27 November 1891.

gilding in the wrong place, the colours of the silk hangings! Eye hath not seen nor pen cannot write to ghastly coarseness of the sight.⁵²

A high-ranking member of the aristocracy, noted society figure and regular country house visitor, Lady Frances Balfour may well have been influenced in her comments by social snobbery and derision of the *nouveaux riches*, probably also anti-Semitic tendencies. The same may perhaps be noted of West.

⁵² Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris, Dinna Forget*, p. 221.

Chapter Twelve

Further Rothschild Houses in the Vale of Aylesbury

A study of the Rothschild mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury in the nineteenth century would not be complete without examining each one of the seven residences owned by the family. By 1883 four houses had been newly built or purchased and renovated by the family in the area: Mentmore House, Aston Clinton House, Tring Park House and Halton House. To this must be added three further properties: Ascott House, Waddesdon Manor and Eythrope Pavillion. The first two properties are today owned and under the management of the National Trust: as a result of this a great deal of detailed scholarship has already been undertaken into the history of the buildings and their interiors and collections.¹ It is not the intention to repeat existing scholarship in this thesis and therefore the following discussions are presented primarily to complete the survey of Rothschild properties in the Vale of Aylesbury.

The acquisition of the Ascott estate again was due to the Rothschild family's desire to purchase land in the Vale of Aylesbury piecemeal and create contiguous estates. The estate and house were a sensible addition to the family's existing landholdings, Ascott was a venue for hunting and quiet country life when inhabited by Leopold de Rothschild (1845-1917). The traditional 'Old English' architectural style which was retained in the renovation of the house reflected its use in this way. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century Ascott House was primarily considered as a location for Leopold and his family to enjoy leisure time away from London, and as a moderate residence for a country gentleman eager to be involved in local politics. Even when married and with three young children Leopold regarded Gunnersbury Park, Middlesex, as his main country residence and retained Ascott House as an informal hunting lodge and rural retreat. The restrained Old English or Jacobean style exterior of the renovated house was matched in its interior and reflected this function. Like his relatives Leopold filled his mansion with objects and furniture of continental craftsmanship, much of which he had inherited from his father. Yet Leopold was less active as a collector than his brothers and uncles in the Vale of Aylesbury.

¹ Or in the case of Waddesdon the National Trust in collaboration with a Rothschild family charitable trust.

The acquisition of Waddesdon Manor by Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898), an Austrian cousin of the English Rothschild family, did not reflect a wish to transform himself into a country gentleman, but rather his affection for the Vale of Aylesbury and desire to entertain his friends and family and display his outstanding art collections. The French Renaissance style Ferdinand chose for his mansion is likely to have arisen from his wish to create a house which reflected his continental connections and a desire to distinguish himself somewhat from his family's other creations on the Vale. In a similar way to Halton House, the flamboyant and Francophile style of Waddesdon Manor's exterior was matched in its interiors.

Ascott House

Purchase by the Rothschild family

By 1858 Lionel de Rothschild had purchased a number of small landholdings close to (and even adjoining) the modest estate of Ascott. When this estate itself became available Lionel decided to purchase it, possibly as early as 1860. A freehold schedule bearing Lionel's name mentions the estate at this date.² In the early twentieth century Lionel's niece, Constance, Lady Battersea (née Rothschild), described the purchase of the estate by her uncle:

Adjoining the Bucks estates, surrounded by property belonging to the then Lord Overstone, stood a charming old farmhouse of the eighteenth century, in the very centre of the hunting country. This was acquired by my Uncle Lionel.³

The Ascott estate consisted of about 80 acres of land and a small two-bedroom seventeenth-century cottage-style farmhouse. As had been the case for both the Tring Park and Halton estates, Lionel did not utilise the Ascott estate as his residence and it was left vacant until 1874. During his lifetime Lionel continued to add to his landholdings around the Ascott estate and enlarge it with small purchases of land and stabling. This evidence suggests that the purchase of the Ascott estate may have been motivated by

² RAL, RFam T/330, Indenture between George Smith of the first part Ian Smith of the second part Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild of the third part, 10 November 1860.

³ Battersea, *Lady de Rothschild, extracts from her notebooks*, p. 45.

Lionel's consistent wish to invest financially in land in the Vale of Aylesbury and his wish to acquire contiguous land and estates.

In 1874 Lionel's third son, Leopold, began to reside at Ascott; he eventually inherited it in 1879. Leopold continued to add to the initial land holdings which he had inherited from his father and bought still more land which lay around it. Constance Battersea remarked that her cousin 'acquired by degrees most of the land around the place.'⁴ This reveals that Leopold was also inclined to consider the purchase land in the Vale of Aylesbury as an investment.



Figure 296: Leopold de Rothschild, c.1910

The purchase of the Ascott estate was also motivated by the common wish of the Rothschild family to reside in close proximity. It was about two miles from the home of Leopold's uncle Mayer at Mentmore and about seven miles from the estate of Aston Clinton where his uncle Anthony resided. Ascott was also very near to Leopold's elder brothers, both around 10 miles away at Tring Park and Halton.

⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

Renovation and enlargement

Whilst initially content to use the modest cottage at Ascott as a residence for hunting and shooting Leopold decided that alterations could be made. In 1888 *The Builder* noted that it was 'a small half-timbered house of the early part of the seventeenth century'.⁵ At Ascott House today the date 1606 is carved on a beam just above the front door (once part of the original cottage building).⁶ Throughout the 1870s and 80s Leopold gradually transformed the dilapidated cottage into a larger family residence and fashionable hunting lodge with extensive stables, kennels and other out buildings.



Figure 297: Sketch by George Devey of the Jacobean farm-house which formed part of Ascott House, c.1874 ('A Notable Collection for the National Trust', *Country Life*, CVIII [1950], 826)

Architect

Leopold chose the architect George Devey to oversee the enlargement of the cottage. As noted in Chapter Four it was probably through family recommendations that Leopold chose him to oversee the enlargement of Ascott.⁷ Devey drew up plans for an Old English

⁵ *Ascott, Buckinghamshire*, ed. by John Martin Robinson (London: Scala, 2008), p. 8; 'Ascott House, Leighton Buzzard', *The Builder*, LV (1888), 386; It was once known as Ascott Hall: In the local church at Wing there is a tablet placed in the memory of Thomas Cotes, a bailiff, who had lived in the cottage in the seventeenth century, the inscription tells us Cotes was 'that sometime porter at Ascott Hall'.

⁶ This date inscription has probably been re-cut and added during later renovations, but it is likely to be accurate, see *Ascott, Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Robinson, p. 8.

⁷ Following Devey's death in 1886 work was continued by his associates Williams, West, Slade & Trentham; *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p. 142; Devey would be so successful in his projects in the Vale of Aylesbury that soon the English Rothschilds' continental relatives sought his services: Anselm de Rothschild (1803-1874) for example employed Devey in the construction of a new dairy at Schillersdorf, Moravia (now Czech Republic).

or Jacobean style house, retaining the original farmhouse at its core. He worked almost continuously until his death in 1886 to create an informal, sinuous range of gables, chimneys and half-timbering. The final product was pleasing to *Country Life*:

Neither imposing nor stately, like some palatial abodes, it has just the character of a comfortable country home...There is abundant charm in the quaint timbered gables and walls, the deep tiled roofs, the bold chimney stacks.⁸

The house probably underwent around eight phases of alterations and enlargement, and upon completion in 1888 boasted around 30 bedrooms.⁹ Documents do not survive to chronicle the building works and so it is unclear what was added to the original cottage at what stage. We can be sure however that the original seventeenth-century cottage lay at the centre of the front of the house at the North Front and became the Hall.¹⁰ An extension was added to the south-west of this in order to create a staircase and Drawing Room.¹¹ Further extensions and domestic offices were added to the north east of the Hall (though much of this was demolished in 1987-8 and in 1992) and a conservatory and billiard room were created.¹² The building firm chosen for the project at Ascott was Messrs. Cubitt & Co.¹³

⁸ 'Country Homes: Ascott', *Country Life Illustrated*, II (1897), 210-212.

⁹ *Ascott, Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Robinson, p. 4; *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p.96.

¹⁰ *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p.96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p.142.

¹³ 'Ascott House, Leighton Buzzard', *The Builder*, LV (1888), 386.

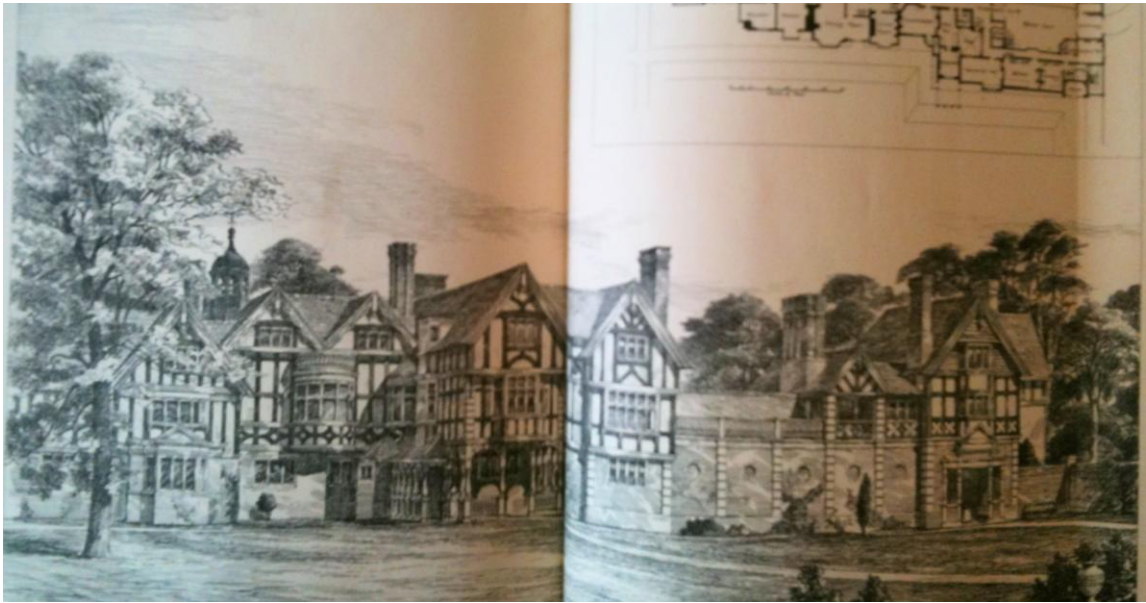


Figure 298: A sketch of Ascott House, c. 1888 ('Ascott House, Leighton Buzzard', *The Builder*, LV [1888], 396)

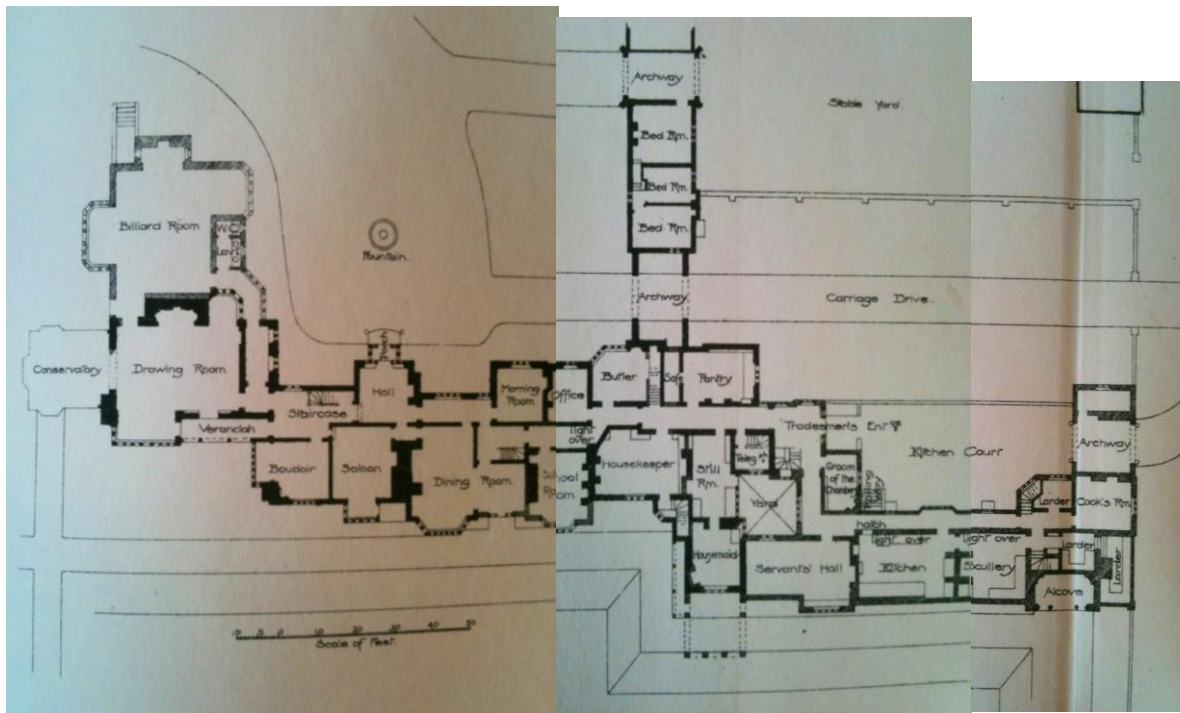


Figure 299: Plan of Ascott House, c. 1888 ('Ascott House, Leighton Buzzard', *The Builder*, LV [1888], 396)



Figure 300: Ascott House, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

Architectural style

In keeping with the style he championed, Devey retained the Old English or Jacobean style of the original seventeenth-century farmhouse at Ascott in his renovations. The completed structure of 1888 appeared both irregular and picturesque, and exhibited a sense of informality in design. It never emulated fully any historical style (as was the case for Mentmore House and Aston Clinton House) but the design was notable for being overwhelmingly English and displaying strong vernacular characteristics.¹⁴ When Ascott was examined by *Country Life* in 1897 it was considered as an ideal example of the 'English country house'.¹⁵ The magazine exclaimed it was 'just the place in which a country gentleman may well reside'.¹⁶

In this way the style adopted for Ascott House by Leopold and Devey may have been a deliberate attempt to retain the vernacular essence of the structure, and create a sense that the house had long been established, and therefore perhaps its owner in the area also. This may have been an attempt to contribute to the wider ambitions of the Rothschild family in aiming for complete assimilation into the social and political circles in the Vale of Aylesbury. The same may have been the case at Mentmore House and Aston Clinton House. Yet the kind of Englishness projected by Ascott was markedly different to that employed by Mayer at Mentmore. The latter was formal and luxurious, even aristocratic,

¹⁴ Kennedy, 'The success of excess: aspects of Englishness in some of the Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury', p. 77.

¹⁵ 'Country Homes: Ascott', *Country Life Illustrated*, II (1897), 210-212.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

whilst Ascott was contrastingly informal and stylised to be vernacular and quaint. This more restrained and unostentatious character was reminiscent of the approach taken by Leopold's uncle Anthony at Aston Clinton.



Figure 301: Ascott House, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1890 (NMRC)

Interior style

There is no evidence to suggest Leopold employed continental-style decorative schemes for Ascott's interiors. Instead he chose arrangements which complemented the existing character and renovated state of his country house. The interiors therefore included features such as Jacobean moulded ceilings, dark carved wood panelling and Jacobean or Inglenook fireplaces. This was an 'Old English' style house which retained the vernacular essence of the old farmhouse from which it had been transformed. This may have been a deliberate attempt to create a sense that the extended and renovated house had long been established, and therefore perhaps its owner in the area also.



Figure 302: Drawing Room, Ascott House, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1889 (NMRC)



Figure 303: Dining Room, Ascott House, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1889 (NMRC)



Figure 304: Billiard Room, Ascott House, Bedford Lemere Collection, 1889 (NMRC)

Collections

Leopold inherited a great deal of the collections of furniture, paintings and *objets d'art* he kept at Ascott from his father Lionel de Rothschild. There is evidence to suggest Leopold had been instrumental in the formation of parts of his father's art collections. During his European tour of the 1860s (accompanied by his cousin Ferdinand), Leopold visited numerous collections and corresponded with his father and uncles, acting somewhat as an agent. In certain letters Lionel instructed Leopold to be 'on the lookout for clocks and pictures'; and also for 'fine old plate among Old Jewish families in Vienna'.¹⁷ Leopold himself reported back to his father that he had seen some 'church treasures' and Gobelins tapestries whilst in Vienna which he was thinking of purchasing for his parents.¹⁸ Leopold evidently knew enough about collecting to be aware of the market price of the art objects he viewed. At one sale in St Petersburg in 1867 for example he wrote again to his father about the 'absurd' tariffs; he added that he and Ferdinand 'were a long time making up our minds' in deciding on what exactly to purchase at this sale, and 'only settled after several bargainings'.¹⁹

Yet Leopold was much less inclined than his brothers to add to his own collection following his father's death. He had inherited a great many paintings, *objets d'art* and items of

¹⁷ RAL, RFam C/4/347, Lionel de Rothschild to Leopold de Rothschild, Autumn 1869; RAL, RFam C/4/348, Lionel de Rothschild to Leopold de Rothschild, 20 September 1869.

¹⁸ RAL, RFam C/5/165, Leopold de Rothschild, Vienna, to Lionel de Rothschild, 22 September, 1869.

¹⁹ RAL, 000/924/5, Leopold de Rothschild, St Petersburg, to Lionel de Rothschild, 16 September 1867.

furniture from his father and appears not to have been too concerned to add greatly to them. Thus Ascott House was furnished largely with items he had inherited, the type of objects also seen in his brothers' collections at Tring Park and Halton.

Due to Ascott's status as a secondary residence and a hunting retreat, the most important of Leopold's paintings were likely to have been displayed at his other properties: Gunnersbury Park, Newmarket House or 5 Hamilton Place, London.²⁰ Though he had little interest in acquiring many more paintings, Leopold did purchase a few works for Ascott House which generally remained within the traditional tastes of the Rothschild family. There were certainly more works of the Dutch and Flemish seventeenth-century school on display at Ascott House (around 20-30 in total) than were to be seen at Mentmore House, Aston Clinton House, and Tring Park House though many less than could be found at Halton House. Their presence owed much to his father Lionel's tastes for such works and were presumably chosen for Ascott House to harmonise with the 'Old English' style of the interiors.²¹ Though not an enthusiastic collector it is probable that Leopold added a few Dutch and Flemish Old Master paintings to those he had inherited to be displayed at Ascott House.²²

Unlike his brothers, Leopold does not seem to have moved beyond the collecting tastes of his father in other areas of painting. In contrast to Tring Park House and Halton House very few English eighteenth-century portraits could be found at Ascott: Leopold was evidently little interested in acquiring these works which his brothers admired.²³ English works acquired by Leopold were either hunting pictures (reflecting his interest in the sport) or contemporary commemorative portraits of his family (for example depicting Leopold's wife Marie, 1862–1937 (née Perugia), and eldest son Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, 1882–1942). French paintings at Ascott House were few in number and Leopold evidently had little interest in acquiring such objects for his traditional English-style hunting lodge.²⁴

²⁰ *Ascott*, ed. by Robinson, p. 15.

²¹ Those Leopold inherited from his father included works by Ludolf Backhuysen, Aelbert Cuyp, Jan van der Heyden, Jan van Huysum, Nicholas Maes, Willem van Mieris, Gaspar Netscher, Adriaen van Ostade, David Teniers, Adriaen van der Velde, Philip Wouvermans, and Jan Wynants. Certain of these had come from the van Loon collection: Ludolf Backhuysen *La Christ et les disciples*, Jan van de Capelle *Marine*, Cornelius Decker and Adriaen van de Velde *Landscape*, Jan Hackaert *A Wooded landscape with a Party of Bandits*, Jan van Huysum *A Basket of Flowers and Fruit* (a pair), Philip van Dyck *Interior with a Man and a Woman*, Nicolaes Maes *The Milk Girl*, and Adriaen van Ostade *Peasants Carousing in front of an Inn*.

²² These included works by Frans Snyder, Jan Steen, Jan van Blarenberg and Jan Brueghel.

²³ Those that he did own he had inherited from his father.

²⁴ Those listed in the 1937 inventory of the house include just two works on copper (Venus with Armorini, and Venus crowned by Cupid), and a portrait of the *Duc d'Orleans* by Hyacinthe Rigaud. Leopold added to these

A very small number of Italian paintings were displayed at Ascott House. According to the 1937 inventory these included a work by Andrea del Sarto (*Madonna and Child with St John*) which Leopold had inherited from his father. Also the *Head of the Virgin with Blue Hood* by Carlo Dolci and three works by the Venetian artist Francesco Guardi (architectural studies). The subject of these works was appropriate for Ascott House: the del Sarto and Dolci works were probably simply considered fine portraits or portrayals of maternal love and beauty, rather than religious images.

Whilst the paintings and general architectural features chosen for the interior of Ascott House leaned away from a show of opulence or ostentation and from continental styles of presentation, the same cannot be said of Leopold's choice of furniture and *objets d'art*. Leopold inherited much French eighteenth-century furniture from his father, a good deal of which he installed at Ascott House. An inventory of 1937 lists predominantly French furniture, many items of which it was claimed were of Louis XV or Louis XVI periods. Some were the work of notable craftsmen made for members of the *Ancien Régime*, and many featured marquetry and ormolu decorative detail.²⁵ The collection also included a few examples of Italian or English furniture, and a good amount of easy or occasional nineteenth-century furniture.

The types of art objects on display at Ascott House were typical of the Rothschild taste for French eighteenth-century objects (Sèvres porcelain jardinière, vases, clocks, ormolu objects, porcelain vases, candelabras, bronze figures, marble and terracotta groups) and German Renaissance *Schatzkammer* objects, much of which Leopold had also inherited. Most of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century continental silver objects were arranged on display in show cabinets in the Library or in the Billiard Room in the tradition of a *Schatzkammer*, as at other Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury.²⁶ A presentation album or catalogue featuring the collection of this silver or 'old plate' was commissioned by

with four over-doors by François Boucher of *The Arts* (acquired from the sale of the collection of Prince Anatole Demidoff sale in 1870. The Boucher works were signed and dated 1758. They were copies or versions of the set commissioned by Madame de Pompadour for her château at Bellevue in 1752-3: *Madame de Pompadour et les arts*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Xavier Salomon, (Paris, 2002), pp. 182-3.

²⁵ Notable craftsmen represented in the collection included Philippe-Claude Montigny, Bernard van Risenburgh, François Rubestuck, Claude-Charles Saunier, Roger Vandercruse (known as Lacroix) and Adam Weisweiler.

²⁶ RAL, 000/400/1, Mrs Leopold de Rothschild, deceased, Ascott, Wing, Valuation for probate for pictures, drawings and prints, furniture, decorative objects and effects, silver, objects of art and virtue and books, Christie, Manson and Woods, July 1937.

Leopold from Ernest Jones and published in 1907.²⁷ 43 pieces were listed, only three of which had not belonged to Lionel (and two of these were inherited by Leopold from other Rothschild collections).²⁸

Conclusion

This combination of restrained, English-style exterior architecture and interior features and fittings with more extravagant continental furniture and art objects at Ascott House is once more surprising. The presence of these objects can be partly explained by the fact that they had been inherited by Leopold from his father and (owing to the fact that he himself took little interest in collecting) were therefore those that were available to him to display at Ascott. Leopold's reverence for his father's collections may also offer some degree of explanation: an example of this is the commemorative catalogue by Ernest Jones of the silver he had inherited.²⁹

Such a combination of English-style architecture and continental art objects had also been seen at Mentmore House when Mayer furnished his mansion in the 1850s and 60s. This similarity perhaps confirms that whilst the Rothschild family often made stylistic choices for architecture which were sympathetic to vernacular styles, they generally admired French and German decorative objects and wished to be surrounded by them in their country residences.

Contemporary reception

Mary Gladstone (daughter of Prime Minister William Gladstone), was particularly pleased with Ascott House when she visited in 1885, exclaiming it was 'a palace-like cottage, the most luxurious and lovely thing I ever saw'.³⁰ *Country Life* of 1897 was similarly complimentary of the final product, remarking on its 'Englishness', comfort and charm:

The house itself is delightfully picturesque. Neither imposing nor stately, like some palatial abodes, it has just the character of a comfortable country home...it rambles

²⁷ E. Alfred Jones, *Catalogue of the Collection of Old Plate of Leopold de Rothschild Esq* (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1890).

²⁸ Hall, 'Baron Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879): the Biography of a Collector of Pictures', p. 429.

²⁹ Jones, *Catalogue of the Collection of Old Plate of Leopold de Rothschild Esq*.

³⁰ *Mary Gladstone: Her Diaries and Letters*, ed. by Lucy Masterman (London, 1930), p. 361.

about over a considerable area, upon no formal plan, and the glorious trees that stand near far overtop its modest gables. The architect has given a true English character to the place. There is abundant charm in the quaint timbered gables and walls, the deep tiled roofs, the bold chimney stacks, the ivy that clothes the structure, and the roses that look in at the mullioned windows.³¹

In a subsequent article of 1900 the house was further praised for its unpretentious character:

The house at Ascott is thoroughly home-like and comfortable...It is set in woodland, so to speak, and is delightfully placed.³²

Waddesdon Manor

Two further members of the Rothschild family decided that the Vale of Aylesbury was so a suitable area in which to settle that they built new properties here in the nineteenth century. Firstly Ferdinand James de Rothschild (1839-1898) who was born in Paris, the third son of Anselm Salomon von Rothschild (1803-1874) founder of the Viennese branch of the Rothschild bank.³³ Ferdinand's mother Charlotte de Rothschild (1807-1859) was the daughter of the founder of the English Rothschild bank, Nathan Mayer de Rothschild and therefore the sister of Lionel de Rothschild who owned so much of the Rothschild lands in the Vale of Aylesbury. Ferdinand had settled in England in the 1860s and had married Lionel's daughter Evelina de Rothschild (1839-1866). Following Evelina's unexpected death in 1866 Ferdinand's sister Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) also came to reside in England and the two rented Leighton House, Leighton Buzzard. In 1874, after the death of his father, Ferdinand wasted no time in purchasing almost 3,000 acres in the Vale of Aylesbury and constructing an impressive country residence from 1874-1884. In 1876 his sister Alice followed in his example and constructed the more modest Eythrope Pavillion nearby.

³¹ 'Country Homes: Ascott', *Country Life Illustrated*, II (1897), 210-212.

³² 'Country Homes and Gardens Old & New: Ascott the Seat of Mr Leopold de Rothschild', *Country Life Illustrated*, VII (1900), 240-247.

³³ The Viennese Rothschilds generally used the prefix 'von'. That Ferdinand and his sister Alice are usually referred to with the prefix 'de' reflects their long-standing association with Britain, and Ferdinand's assumption of British citizenship.



Figure 305: Ferdinand de Rothschild, by Cyril Flower, 1st Baron Bathersea, early 1890s (National Portrait Gallery)

Ferdinand began work to build his country house at Waddesdon soon after 1874 completing it in 1884.³⁴ He therefore dedicated a surprising 10 years to the completion of his dream home. The results of such dedication and care however were clear for all to see in the quality of workmanship and attention to detail, both outside and inside the house.

Architectural style

As a result of his European upbringing Ferdinand retained an affinity for the history and culture of France. In contrast to the majority of his uncles and cousins therefore he decided to commission a French architect to create his residence in a Renaissance 'château-style', based on those he had seen and admired in the Loire Valley. Having lately overseen the restoration of certain fifteenth- and sixteenth-century châteaux of that area (such as the château of the Duc de Mouchy) Gabriel-Hippolyte Destailleur (1822-1893) was already experienced in working in this style and the ideal candidate for Ferdinand's commission. Destailleur had also been employed by the Rothschild family in designing part of the Palais Rothschild on the Prinz-Eugen-Strasse in Vienna in the early 1870s. Ferdinand justified his choice of architect in his *Red Book* of 1897:

³⁴ Yet whilst the main part of the building was ready by 1883, work continued until 1889.

It may be asked, what induced me to employ foreign instead of native talent of which there was no lack of at hand? My reply is, that having been greatly impressed by the ancient Chateaux of the Valois during a tour I once made in the Touraine, I determined to build my house in the same style, and considered it safer to get the designs made by a French architect who was familiar with the work, than by an English one whose knowledge and experience of the architecture of that period could be less thoroughly trusted.³⁵

The house which Destailleur created for Ferdinand was an eclectic mix of elements drawn from many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century châteaux, amalgamated and combined with elements of decoration from later centuries.³⁶



Figure 306: Waddesdon Manor, Entrance Front, late nineteenth century (Country Life Photographic Archive, 525450)

³⁵ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 54 and acc. 938, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book*, 1897.

³⁶ For example the towers were based on the Château de Maintenon and the twin staircase towers inspired by the Château de Chambord. Svend Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor, A Guide to the House and its Contents* (National Trust, 1982), p. 3.



Figure 307: Waddesdon Manor, Garden Front, late nineteenth century (Country Life Photographic Archive, 738410)



Figure 308: Waddesdon Manor, c.2009

The choice of style was a pronounced departure from the vernacular styles of architecture employed at Mentmore House, Aston Clinton House and Ascott House by Ferdinand's cousins and uncles. Indeed, as Oonagh Kennedy writes, Waddesdon had 'much more in common with the building projects of the Continental Rothschilds than with the family's other houses in the Vale of Aylesbury'.³⁷

Yet the style Ferdinand chose for his house was not without precedent in England, was not unique, and probably not unusual. As has been noted in earlier chapters French

³⁷ Kennedy, 'The success of excess: aspects of Englishness in some of the Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury', p. 78.

Classicism was well received in the prevailing atmosphere of architectural eclecticism, amongst all sections of society. Of course as the century progressed it did become more popular amongst newly-wealthy individuals: this is said to have resulted from their wish to express their confidence, wealth and ostentation.³⁸ Ferdinand's cousin Alfred later also chose to build his house at Halton in this style.

Ferdinand later explained why he opted for this architectural style:

The French sixteenth century style, on which I had long set my heart, was particularly suitable to the surroundings of the site I had selected, and more uncommon than the Tudor, Jacobean, or Adams, of which the country affords so many and such unique specimens.³⁹

As is made clear from these words Ferdinand's choice of the French Renaissance style was one which arose more from negative reasons than any interest in contemporary developments in architecture: it is likely he wished to 'avoid comparison with the houses his family had already built'.⁴⁰ When consulted by Lord Rosebery in 1880 about the best choice of architecture Ferdinand advised:

The Italian Renaissance requires enormous proportions. Louis XVI is the simplest and cheapest & I think as good as any...Louis XIV is grander and handsomer, but as my brother has just built one of that style & employed D[estailleur] I should avoid running the risk of copying'.⁴¹

Whether his house was ever intended to compete with the grandeur of nearby Mentmore House or the extravagance of Halton House is unclear. A guide to the house by Svend Eriksen proclaims that 'the house is Ferdinand's creation and celebrates Rothschild taste and its European roots'.⁴² Waddesdon was perhaps the grandest of the houses of the Rothschild family in England, undoubtedly at the top end of country house construction. The purchase of the land cost £240,000 (and required £55,000 worth of work to be levelled

³⁸ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 31; Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, p. 24.

³⁹ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 54 and acc. 938, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book*, 1897.

⁴⁰ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 44.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 8.

and for access to the site to be created), and the shell of the house alone cost £87,000 to be completed. This total of £382,000 was a vast amount for the time.

Interiors and collections

The tastes of Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) in collecting were largely in line with those of his uncles and cousins, and his schemes for Waddesdon Manor were directed by his informed knowledge of France and its decorative arts.⁴³ He expressed an overwhelming wish to reconstruct 'rooms out of old material, reproducing them as they had been during the reigns of the Louis'.⁴⁴ Similar schemes, incorporating such genuine architectural fittings into nineteenth-century interiors, had been made by Ferdinand's uncle Mayer at Mentmore House (but to a much lesser extent than that now seen at Waddesdon Manor) and his cousin Alfred had recreated Francophile Rococo-style interiors at Halton House with the use of plaster reproduction fittings. But Ferdinand did not use such reproduction materials: for him the only correct method was to use genuine items. This was a concern which extended to all aspects of Waddesdon Manor and Ferdinand's collections: he was prepared to spend great amounts on the creation of faithful interiors containing genuine antique objects of the highest quality.



Figure 309: Grey Drawing Room, Waddesdon Manor (*Country Life Illustrated*, XII [1902], 808)

⁴³ Ibid., p.10.

⁴⁴ Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 54 and acc. 938, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book* (1897).

As Svend Eriksen notes, 'Ferdinand's lifelong passion was collecting' and he had been influenced in his stylistic choices from a young age.⁴⁵ His upbringing in Europe, mainly spent in Paris, Vienna and Frankfurt, must have exposed him to the European art market and the kind of objects collected by his European relatives. Ferdinand's childhood home at Grüneburg, just outside Frankfurt, was a clear precedent for the interior decoration and style found at Waddesdon Manor. At Grüneburg a Renaissance architectural style was combined with French eighteenth-century interiors, 'derived from an interest in the furniture of the period' shown by Ferdinand's mother.⁴⁶ Ferdinand had also aided his uncle Lionel in his purchases of objects and furniture for his residences by travelling to the continent and securing items of interest in the 1860s (with his cousin Leopold). He and his cousin purchased some items for Lionel: in 1867 after viewing the collection at the 'Ruchelev Palace' near St Peterburg Ferdinand wrote to his uncle Lionel 'we did not telegraph to you about some very pretty things for we felt sure that if we could continue to get them at a moderate price for you, you would be satisfied with them.'⁴⁷ When it came to furnishing Waddesdon Manor therefore Ferdinand had already formed strong tastes and preferences.

It was Ferdinand at Waddesdon Manor who reproduced the French Rococo style so often preferred by his family most faithfully. As Michael Hall notes Ferdinand was concerned in a way that 'surpassed his English relatives to collate complementary original component pieces in the interiors of Waddesdon Manor in order to evoke the French eighteenth century and create a unity of theme'.⁴⁸ The interiors of his mansion were invariably opulent and luxurious, wholly intended to charm his guests and show his collections of antique furniture and *objets d'art* to best effect. In similar taste to his uncles and cousins, Ferdinand's collections consisted of eighteenth-century French furniture, French tapestries, eighteenth-century British portraits, and Renaissance German art objects.

⁴⁵ Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Presumably the residence of the 'Princess Galitzin' of the Russian Galitzine family: RAL, 000/26, Ferdinand de Rothschild, St Petersburg, to Lionel de Rothschild, 16 September 1867.

⁴⁸ Michael Hall, 'Bric-a-Brac: a Rothschild's Memoir of Collecting', *Apollo Magazine*, 166 (2007), 50-77.



Figure 310: Dining Room, Waddesdon Manor (*Country Life Illustrated*, XII [1902], 808)

As his cousin Alfred did, Ferdinand also collected Dutch and Flemish Old Master paintings. Ferdinand inherited a number of such works from his father, Anselm von Rothschild (1803-1874). He further continued to collect this genre of works and built up an enviable collection. Ferdinand greatly admired English eighteenth-century portraits, particularly full-length examples, and especially those depicting beautiful young women. These pieces were indeed integral to the interior decoration of Waddesdon Manor: elegant full-length portraits adorned the major entertaining rooms, either hung on Rococo-inspired silk and brocade, or set into recesses of the genuine *boiseries*. As had been the case at Halton House these works added glamour and drama to already opulent interiors. Ferdinand limited himself exclusively to works by Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, and George Romney: these were evidently the works he most prized.

Compared with his uncle Mayer and cousin Alfred, Ferdinand showed little inclination to acquire French eighteenth-century works for Waddesdon Manor. He evidently admired the purchases of figures such as the 4th Marquess of Hertford in the area of French eighteenth-century painting and shared an enthusiasm for the sentimental works of Jean-Baptiste Greuze, but no works by Antoine Watteau or Jean-Honoré Fragonard were displayed at his country residence. He did have several overdoors by François Boucher (or

in the manner of), and single examples of Jean-Baptiste Pater and Nicolas Lancret (both *fêtes galantes*); but as Michael Hall suggests, these seem ‘minor ventures’.⁴⁹



Figure 311: Picture Gallery, Waddesdon Manor (*Country Life Illustrated*, XII [1902], 808)

The furniture kept at Waddesdon Manor during Ferdinand's lifetime was however overwhelmingly of the eighteenth-century French style, both genuine and imitation objects. There were 12 examples alone which had been made for the French crown by leading Paris cabinet-makers.⁵⁰ Carpets dated to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and many had come from the royal Savonnerie factory.

The most extensive use of *boiseries* in the mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury by the Rothschild family was to be found at Waddesdon Manor. Ferdinand's architect, Destailleur, purchased many sets of French *boiseries* to be installed in the completed house. These were often whole sets of panelling and were assembled in more than 20 rooms in the house: the catalogue of the house today lists 365 separate entries of ‘*boiseries* and wooden elements’.⁵¹ Bruno Pons finds that ‘a collection of this kind, especially one so large’ is ‘remarkably rare’.⁵²

In the same way as his cousins in their residences in the Vale of Aylesbury, Ferdinand created a private treasure collection, or *Kunstammer*, at Waddesdon Manor. Dora

⁴⁹ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 70.

⁵⁰ Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor*, p.10.

⁵¹ Harris, *Moving Rooms*, p. 66.

⁵² These *boiseries* mostly dated from the Louis XV or Louis XVI period; Pons, *Architecture and Panelling*, p.73.

Thornton feels that it was Ferdinand's 'ambition to possess a great room filled with precious objects, in the tradition of the Renaissance and Baroque courts of Europe.'⁵³ He had inherited many of these objects from his father Anselm von Rothschild (1803-1874), revealing again the inherited nature of much Rothschild taste in art objects and furniture. Ferdinand continued to add to the collection so that by his death it amounted to about 265 objects in total.⁵⁴ These were kept in display cabinets in a room built in the 1890s specifically to house the collection (the Smoking Room) which as a result took on a 'discrete and separate identity'.⁵⁵ In its Neo-Renaissance decoration this room contrasted with the French eighteenth-century character of other rooms of the house, a common feature of many such purpose built areas.⁵⁶ Alfred at Halton House had also created such a distinction between public and private areas through such stylistic differences in the 1880s. It is likely that Ferdinand and Alfred shared their ideas on the subject of *Schatzkammer* arrangements, an interest which was popular with collectors in this period in general.⁵⁷ Furthermore Ferdinand and Alfred were emulating (and perhaps competing with) their continental cousins in the creation of such 'treasure collections', particularly those in Paris who began creating such arrangements in the 1870s.

⁵³ Dora Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstammer* of the nineteenth century', *Silver Studies* (2008), 57-67.

⁵⁴ Anselm von Rothschild's collection totalled around 30 pieces (including medieval and Renaissance gold and silver plate, jewels, enamels etc) which he had begun collecting in the 1830s under the guidance of the painter Mortiz Daniel Oppenheim: Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstammer* of the nineteenth century', 57-67; Ferdinand's collection was later donated to the British Museum: Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstammer* of the nineteenth century', 57-67.

⁵⁶ For example Thornton mentions Sir Julius Wernher's Red Room at Bath House, London, which displayed his Renaissance treasure, and contrasted with his Pink Drawing Room; Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstammer* of the nineteenth century', 57-67.

⁵⁷ See Chapter Six for a fuller discussion of nineteenth-century *Schatzkammer*.



Figure 312: Smoking Room, Waddesdon Manor (*Country Life Illustrated*, XII [1902], 808)

As in the case of other nineteenth-century Rothschild collectors, Ferdinand was able to capitalise on the hardships of many aristocratic English families and acquire furniture and objects for Waddesdon Manor through private sales.⁵⁸ Like many of his English relations Ferdinand did not generally purchase items at auction; instead he commissioned dealers to secure items for him (including Agnew's, Annoot and Gale and Charles Davis). The dealer Alexander Barker who had been so influential in the furnishing of Mentmore House was also involved in Ferdinand's early collecting, sharing his taste for decorative arts.⁵⁹ In addition Ferdinand purchased items from Samson Wertheimer who also acted as an agent for his cousins Alfred and Leopold: Ferdinand's relationship with the dealer was such that he even acted as godfather to one of his children.⁶⁰

However, in contrast to some of his relatives, Ferdinand did not wholly contract out the decorating and furnishing of Waddesdon Manor and instead relied a great deal upon his own judgements and discrimination. As with so many of his relatives Ferdinand was often concerned with the historical value of art objects and furniture. He had a keen interest in past collectors and European collections which he had studied whilst travelling on the continent or that he had read about.⁶¹ Ferdinand himself expressed his preference for objects of historic periods in his *Reminiscences*:

⁵⁸ The Waddesdon collection therefore included objects formerly in the possession of the Dukes of Hamilton, Buccleuch, Devonshire, and Rutland and the Earls Spencer and Fitzwilliam for example.

⁵⁹ *Waddesdon, The Rothschild Collection* (National Trust, 2003), introduction.

⁶⁰ Hall, *Waddesdon Manor*, p. 76.

⁶¹ Thornton, 'The Waddesdon Bequest as a neo-*Kunstkammer* of the nineteenth century', 57-67.

Old works of art are not, however, desirable only for their rarity or beauty, but for their associations, for memories they evoke, the trains of thought to which they lead, and the many ways they stimulate the imagination and realise our ideals.⁶²

There were 12 examples of furniture alone at Waddesdon Manor for instance which had been made for the French crown by leading Parisian cabinet-makers.⁶³

As in the case of Halton House, Ferdinand's mansion received a mixed response from visitors. The American author Henry James, a frequent guest of the Rothschild family, noted the 'gilded bondage of that glorious place'.⁶⁴ In contrast however Mary Gladstone noted that she felt 'much oppressed with the extreme gorgeousness and luxury'.⁶⁵ Though of course this 'extreme gorgeousness and luxury' was just the kind of experience Ferdinand was aiming to recreate and provide his guests.

Contemporary reception

Surviving contemporary opinions on the house upon completion are largely favourable. A well-known society figure, Lady Frances Balfour, described the house soon after it was completed:

It is an adaption by a French architect, of Blois. It stands on the top of a high solitary hill, and the approach winds round the hill as it goes up in great sweeping curves. The whole is in wonderfully good taste and the views are magnificent.⁶⁶

Sir Edward Hamilton was a frequent guest to the house and upon its completion in 1883 remarked that it was a 'truly gorgeous erection piled up on a splendid site, a reproduction of the chateau at Blois; perfect all detail'.⁶⁷ He later added 'it is certainly one of the finest creations of an individual in modern times'.⁶⁸

⁶² Waddesdon Manor Archive, acc. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897.

⁶³ Eriksen, *Waddesdon Manor*, p.10.

⁶⁴ H. James, *Letters*, ed. by L. Edel, iii (New York, 1981), 98: H. James to Grace Norton, 22 August 1885.

⁶⁵ *Mary Gladstone: Her Diaries and Letters*, ed. by Lucy Masterman (London, 1930), p. 361.

⁶⁶ Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris, Dinna Forget*.

⁶⁷ *Diary of Sir Edward Walter Hamilton, 1883-1885*, ed. by Dudley W. R. Bahlman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 12 August 1883.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 June 1884.

Eythrope Pavilion

The final house belonging to the Rothschild family to be built in the Vale of Aylesbury was Eythrope Pavilion. In 1876, two years after Ferdinand had purchased Waddesdon and Winchendon his sister Alice bought the adjoining Eythrope estate for £180,000 and also constructed a house.⁶⁹ Alice suffered from rheumatic fever and decided that the site she had chosen, on the curve of the river Thames, would be detrimental to her health. Whilst spending her days at Eythrope therefore she returned to Waddesdon Manor each evening.⁷⁰

Alice also chose George Devey as her architect and unusually directed him to build a house without any bedrooms. The resulting structure, smaller than any of the other Rothschild properties in the Vale, became known as the Eythrope Water Pavillion. The house was somewhat of a deviation from Devey's more typical creations as he combined his usual Jacobean style with that of the French Renaissance, rejecting the grandiose French style chosen for Waddesdon and instead creating a rambling structure.⁷¹

Alice's decision to purchase another estate in the Vale of Aylesbury, and to construct another house in the area owes primarily to her wish to reside near to her brother, and cousins, whilst establishing her own residence. Her choice of style for her house directly reflected that of Waddesdon Manor, and she chose an architect already familiar to her relations and no doubt recommended by them.

⁶⁹ The purchase price was £18,000.

⁷⁰ RAL, 'Research Forum: Rothschild Property: Eythrope', Research Forum: Guides to family properties, The Rothschild Research Forum, <<http://www.rothschildarchive.org/research/?doc=/research/articles/eythrope>> [accessed June 2011] (para 1 of 1).

⁷¹ Ibid.



Figure 313: Eythrope Pavillion (CBS, Photograph ref 0216211000)

Eythrope is today the only Rothschild residence in the Vale of Aylesbury which remains in family possession and occupation.

Conclusions

The English Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury: conclusions

By 1890 the English Rothschild family had established themselves in seven large country estates and mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury and had most assuredly entered the class of landed gentry. This fact is made more remarkable when it is considered that Nathan Mayer Rothschild had only settled in Britain less than 100 years earlier and upon his arrival could not speak a word of English.¹ These were estates upon which the family could hunt and shoot and which enabled them to hold sway in local government. Furthermore they were assets which could be bequeathed to future generations. Pevsner has described the grouping of properties owned by the Rothschild family in the Vale as 'the most conspicuous and significant aspect of Victorian architecture in Buckinghamshire'.² As has been discussed the Rothschild family were not unique in such undertakings. Plenty of *nouveau-riche* individuals acquired residences in the countryside in this period: these were typical actions, aims and ideals repeated throughout Britain's history. As Hannah de Rothschild (daughter of Jacob, 4th Lord Rothschild) recently noted, the English Rothschilds were just one family in 'a long line of "wannabes" to erect shrines to their own success'³ The English Rothschild family's activities in the Vale command such attention largely because they bought so much land and established so many residences in just one area of the country: by 1880 six branches of the English Rothschild family were established in the Vale, and seven distinct and substantial mansions had been created or renovated. At the end of the century the family's landholdings in the area amounted to over 30,000 acres, this could be rivalled by few other *nouveau-riche* individuals or families elsewhere.

An examination of the Rothschild family's ownership and presentation of country houses in the nineteenth century has highlighted that the decision to establish seven country residences in the Vale of Aylesbury and the manner of their presentation was motivated primarily by private, practical and emotional considerations, but also by more calculated and aspirational intentions. Neither set of incentives should be seen in isolation or as more influential than the other. Initially it was hunting and leisure that had first inspired the family

¹ Nathan Mayer Rothschild himself related at a dinner party that he arrived in England speaking only German: *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell, Bart.*, ed. by Charles Buxton (London, 1872), p. 343.

² *Buildings of England 19: Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Pevsner and Williamson, p. 93.

³ Rothschild, *The Baroness*, p. 63.

to purchase land and country residences in the Vale of Aylesbury. The country mansions they acquired or built were destinations for the family to indulge in private pleasures, to escape the city and to relax. The strong ties of family members in this period meant that they were enthusiastic about settling near one to one another and socialising together. As noted the architectural choices for the mansions grew from very particular and personal circumstances. Furthermore certain of the residences provided locations in which family members could indulge their love of collecting and display, which was undoubtedly an inherited inclination. Inside the houses family members collected objects they liked the most, which they were often preconditioned to acquire as a result of their upbringing, and which were available to purchase in large quantities in this period as a result of particular conditions in Britain and Europe. The interior modes of presentation the family members chose frequently reflected their individual personalities, requirements and affluence. Ultimately, though of course providing certain social benefits, the acquisition of these country mansions was not a premeditated and superficial attempt by the English Rothschild family to buy ready-made gentility.

Early chapters of this thesis have shown that the accumulation of land and assumption of political and social influence in the Vale of Aylesbury by the Rothschild family was more gradual, more accidental, and motivated by many more varied factors than simply the desire to emulate the aristocracy or for 'gentrification'. Of course the family realised that business was not played out simply in the boardrooms of the Rothschild bank: politics and social power played a large part in country life. They knew that in order to join in with such a world and take best advantage of it, Rothschild family members had to create residences where they could entertain on an impressive and lavish scale.

The family's purchase of so much land in a relatively isolated area of the country, particularly when so much was gleaned from the old aristocracy, did not go unnoticed. Some authors found this acquisition of land by newly-wealthy men even more shocking when they considered that the Rothschilds were also Jewish. In 1858 author Robert Smith Surtees created an imaginary location with distinct similarities to the Vale of Aylesbury in his book *Ask Mamma*, and dubbed it 'Jewdaea'.⁴ In 1885 Thomas H.S. Escott, editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, noted that 'English society, once ruled by an aristocracy, is now

⁴ Surtees, *Ask Mamma*, p. 282.

dominated by plutocracy. And this plutocracy is to a large extent Hebraic in composition.'⁵ As already noted, in 1907 Escott further recorded the 'Israelitish annexation of Buckinghamshire'.⁶

Yet within a short time the Rothschild family were entrenched as local residents in the Vale of Aylesbury and well-liked by the local population. This was due in part to the benevolence they showed towards inhabitants of their estates through the provision of new houses, schools and other buildings or facilities.⁷ Equally luck in agriculture encouraged the positive opinion of local people: the Rothschild family were interested in new farming methods and so encouraged dairy farming, which began to overtake more traditional sheep grazing in this period. On the Rothschild lands unemployment was low, wages remained high and the family often used their money to invest in farming and keep their farm labourers in employment (particularly during the agricultural crisis of the late nineteenth century).⁸ Therefore through both philanthropic concern and sheer luck the Rothschild family were able to create a solid rural identity in the Vale, which further strengthened their position. As has been discussed in Chapter Three the position of the Rothschild family in the nineteenth century was also strengthened by other aspects of their lives: by the 1880s the Rothschild family had served in local government, as MPs, and one members had been admitted to the peerage. They had attended Cambridge University and were admitted to the most exclusive London Clubs and societies. The social benefits which the family found in the ownership of country estates as a result of the ability to entertain high-ranking friends and allies were significant.

The presentation of these country residences was important, and has been examined in this thesis. The exterior and interior of the Rothschild country mansions combined to create a specific aesthetic and particular image which was presented by the family to the rest of society. In architectural terms it has been shown that no one model was favoured by the family; each house displayed a different architectural edifice, reflecting the personal and individual aims of the owner and functions of the property. Yet all of the residences combined luxury and comfort in their design, furthermore Rothschild family members

⁵ T.H.S. Escott, *Society in London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1885), p. 86.

⁶ Escott, *Society in the Country House*, pp. 472-3.

⁷ The Halton Industrial Exhibition for example was a reflection of the family's concern with the welfare and development of the population of the Vale of Aylesbury.

⁸ Adam, *Beechwoods & Bayonets*, p. 50; Cowles, *The Rothschilds: a Family of Fortune*, p. 118.

chose to employ the same small group of craftsmen for their various building projects. In certain cases the styles chosen in which to build or renovate were sympathetic to the Englishness both of the countryside in which the houses were situated, and the family themselves. Some indeed overtly referenced the fact, perhaps facilitating a degree of acceptance for the family. Of course in addition it has been shown that the family's association with French classical architecture grew as the century progressed, seen most especially in the examples of Halton House and Waddesdon Manor. As noted this style was a particularly suitable choice for mansions intended primarily to be flamboyant and frivolous. In addition at Tring Park House the style was employed as a way of updating and refreshing the old mansion and perhaps to reveal the family's continental tastes, encouraged by their upbringing and background. As the family's confidence grew through the course of the nineteenth-century their wish, and ability, to be more flamboyant and remarkable in their architectural choices is evident.

Inside the Rothschild mansions the collections of fine and decorative arts often revealed the influence of the family's Germanic, merchant banking background: for example through the *Schatzkammer* objects and Dutch and Flemish paintings so many family members possessed. The second and third generation of English Rothschilds frequently continued such established and inherited tastes, but increasingly combined them with new preferences, which arose from their rapid assimilation into British culture and society (as seen for example in the admiration many showed for English eighteenth-century portraits). Furthermore certain family members' tastes developed from the kind of society, experiences and objects they were exposed to, which appealed most to them and which were available to purchase. French Rococo-revival styles for example were well-known and admired in the period that the Rothschild family were collecting and adorning their country houses and French eighteenth-century objects were readily available on the market. Furthermore for the English Rothschild family such objects and styles facilitated a certain historicism, glamour and opulence, and the creation of an impression of high status and wealth in their country mansions.

The English Rothschild family shared certain common tastes in their collecting and interior decoration for their mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury. Each admired French eighteenth-century *objets d'art* and furniture and Renaissance *Schatzkammer* pieces. Several of them

continued a long-established Rothschild tradition of collecting Old Master works, a number showed an interest in French eighteenth-century paintings, whilst others revealed an admiration of English full-length portraits of the eighteenth-century. Interiors could be eclectic, variously in the neoclassical, Italian Renaissance or French eighteenth-century style, and it is not possible to define *le goût Rothschild* as any one interior style or type of collection. However there were some common characteristics to the Rothschild manner of presentation: generally it was a detailed, elaborate style of interior decoration, which took its inspiration from continental tastes and employed lavish and extravagant textile fabrics or fine wall panelling along with eighteenth-century French furniture and decorative art objects, large amounts of ormolu or gilt decorative details and the frequent use of glass. In addition it is clear that it was the ensemble which was important to each collector: works of art and furniture were acquired to furnish the mansions as part of domestic ensembles, not to be considered as objects in isolation. It was these patterns which appear again and again in the interiors of the English Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury, and indeed in residences of all branches of the family.

As has been demonstrated in this thesis the Rothschild family's collecting activities and mode of interior presentation in their mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury were not unique in this period. Family members did not initiate new trends in collecting or display and instead endorsed largely traditional and popular tastes (although they often encouraged an interest in certain styles and objects by certain of their collecting activities). Whether this support for such tastes was entirely deliberate and premeditated, or undertaken with more personal and less calculated intent is never revealed in the personal papers and correspondence of the family. It is likely though, and this thesis has shown, that both aspects were at play. It has also however been shown that whilst the Rothschild family frequently simply endorsed existing trends they also drove them to further extremes. Evidence in this thesis has proven that in the nineteenth century there was no one distinct 'style Rothschild' and that the idea of a unique Rothschild mode of presentation is one which was constructed much later, formed from a cluster of styles.

If the presentation of the Rothschild country mansions did not radically differ from general trends, we might question why the phrase *le goût Rothschild* has been applied to describe them. Instead of seeing the appearance of Rothschild interiors in their mansions in the

Vale of Aylesbury as unique, or suggesting the family instituted entirely new trends in collecting, other reasons must be identified to explain why the Rothschild family has been considered so distinctive and important in the history of collecting and presentation. Yet there were certain characteristics in the modes of display and collecting tastes of the English Rothschild family which made the interiors of their mansions distinctive. The answer lies in the fact that Rothschild interiors were more luxurious, more sumptuous, and contained a higher quantity of objects of a higher quality than most other collectors of the time. The family members were highly influenced in their collecting and display at their various country residences by continental trends and fashions as a result of having so many European contacts, and being part of a truly continental family network. Their tastes were as a result cosmopolitan and European, and they often collected in emulation and rivalry with their European relations, rather than their English contemporaries. The English Rothschild taste was also one which had been passed down through generations of the family and was one which they collaborated on and competed with one another to create. In addition with such fortunes the English Rothschilds could afford to acquire an astonishing quantity of objects, invariably of the highest quality. Finally it must also owe to the fact that the family was so ubiquitous and wealthy.

Cannadine considers that the 'Rothschild style', manifest in their mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury, was a 'plutocratic rather than an aristocratic aesthetic'.⁹ This appears to be the case: it was the sense of luxury, of extravagance and of quantity the family created in their residences which made it so. When compared with aristocratic collections and interiors these are the qualities which most distinguish the Rothschild style: indeed the majority of the aristocracy of this period, increasingly impoverished, simply could not afford such an aesthetic.¹⁰ The *Spectator* of 1872 noted 'our millionaires are maniacs for collecting things', this was certainly true of the English Rothschild family.

As a vastly influential and wealthy family which had made its mark in the world of high finance and international banking the Rothschilds were ambitious, discerning and driven. It cannot have escaped the attention of the family that country residences could play a pivotal and significant part in raising the profile of any *nouveau-riche* individual and present

⁹ Cannadine, 'The embarrassment of riches', 12-23.

¹⁰ Of course there were exceptions to this, such as Warwick Castle and Knole for example. Re-presented in a lavish and expensive way by their aristocratic owners.

a particular image to contemporaries. The family's tastes were undoubtedly motivated by their wish to furnish their houses in a particular way, which from the 1850s became a visible assertion of their wealth and power: they were lavish, and intended to be visibly luxurious, impressing a sense of wealth, sumptuousness and style as well as bringing comfort and status to their owners.

The Rothschild houses in the Vale of Aylesbury were also public arenas in which family members could impress their affluence, authority and extravagant, historically-endorsed tastes upon guests. The mansions were locations of considerable social activity for a family which recognised that valuable business, political and social relationships could be further developed in the countryside through the provision of luxurious hospitality. The exterior and interior presentation of the mansions exhibited a concern by the family members to associate themselves with the past, and with established canons of taste, but also showed they could take such qualities as luxury and opulence to extremes. As Hannah de Rothschild again notes 'by buying up the assets of grand, well-established families, the Rothschilds were, in effect, tying their history and their provenance to a more illustrious past'.¹¹ These properties must have helped to underline the family's position in society, allowing them to present themselves as wealthy landowners, with more than enough resources and education to collect the best items, and create fashionable and luxurious interiors for their country residences where they entertained high profile guests and business associates. With a moderate level of consciousness the English Rothschild family were adding respectability to their relatively new position in society in the form of impressive country estates, houses and collections.

Such undertakings certainly aided the family's successful integration into the highest ranks of British society by the end of the nineteenth century. The second generation of family members laid the foundations for such a success, aided in part by their ownership of country estates and properties: Mayer and Anthony de Rothschild were highly involved in the local government of the Vale of Aylesbury by the 1860s, Anthony was awarded a Baronetcy, and the family were firm friends with figures such as Benjamin Disraeli. Family members of the third generation built on these opportunities with enthusiasm: all three of Lionel de Rothschild's sons attended Cambridge University where they mixed with the

¹¹ Rothschild, *The Baroness*, p. 63.

upper echelons of society (befriending amongst others the Prince of Wales), Nathaniel de Rothschild became the first Jewish member of the House of Lords, Alfred de Rothschild became the first Jewish Director of the Bank of England, and Hannah de Rothschild married future Prime Minister the 5th Earl of Rosebery. By 1900 the power of the English Rothschild family was no longer based purely on their banking wealth and influence but also on their presence as prominent and respected estate and country house owners in the Vale of Aylesbury.

Legacy

The particular aesthetic and lifestyle which English Rothschild family members (and their Rothschild relations from all over Europe) made so famous was imitated by other rich and powerful plutocrats in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Most notable were the American families of Vanderbilt, Astor, Rockefeller and Du Pont, who became the most powerful and wealthy upper class families in the American Gilded Age (the period roughly from the 1870s to the turn of the twentieth century). They had amassed their fortunes by way of industry in the late-nineteenth century and though they lacked a noble background were highly socially ambitious, determined to imitate and surpass the aristocracy of Europe in the lifestyles they led. This attitude extended to the furnishing of their numerous residences. The preferred style was that which has become known as *le goût Rothschild*; it was adopted in a lavish and opulent way by these families from about the 1890s to the 1920s (continuing until the 1960s in some cases, though in a more subdued manner). The most common decorative interior elements these American plutocrats favoured were extravagant heavy textile fabrics (for example damask, brocade, and velvet), abundant gilding, elaborate stucco ceilings, and wooden panelling with parquet flooring. This luxury and abundance was combined with eighteenth-century furniture and *objets d'art*, usually of French manufacture or style. Often they purchased whole interiors of French châteaux or English castles and country houses and installed them in their residences, attempting to recreate interiors of a decidedly European aristocratic taste.

A number of collecting preferences for which the English Rothschild family of the nineteenth century had shown an enthusiasm were adopted with gusto by certain

American plutocrats. Individuals such as the railroad magnate Henry E. Huntington (1850-1927), industrialist and financier Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919) and the financier John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) were highly enthusiastic about acquiring English eighteenth-century portraits for example. From about 1900 such collectors entered into the English auction market and sought the type of glamorous, large scale and romantic portraits by Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, George Romney and Thomas Lawrence that Alfred, Nathaniel and Ferdinand de Rothschild had desired for their country residences. This was an instance perhaps of rich businessmen seeking to identify themselves with the old aristocracy by buying up their family portraits.¹²

The Astor family in particular became one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in America in the nineteenth century. They were known for their numerous building projects in New York such as the château-style Waldorf and Astoria hotels and the luxurious Beechwood mansion in Newport, Rhode Island. The influence of French-style interior decoration was highly evident at Beechwood: the Music Room for example was decorated with wallpaper imported from Paris.



Figure 314: Astoria hotel, completed in 1897

¹² S.N. Behrman, *Duveen* (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 97.



Figure 315: Interiors of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, c.1930s



Figure 316: Beechwood, c. 2008

The Vanderbilt family initially found success in their shipping and railroad empires; they later expanded in to various other areas of industry and philanthropy. Family members built great Fifth Avenue mansions in New York and country houses in Newport, Rhode Island. Examples include The Breakers, built as the Newport summer home of Cornelius Vanderbilt II (1843-1899), Marble House, Newport, built for William Kissam Vanderbilt (1849-1920), Biltmore House, North Carolina, built for George Washington Vanderbilt II (1862-1915) and the 'Petit Chateau' (or William K. Vanderbilt House), New York, built for William Kissam Vanderbilt (1849-1920). A number of examples of their residences must be sited here. In New York the Fifth Avenue residence of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875-1942) contained the fittings of a 20 meter long ballroom taken from a French château which had once belonged to a courtier of Louis XIV. Inside were fireplaces

imported from other French châteaux and sixteenth-century French tapestries with royal provenance. The design of Marble House took inspiration from the Petit Trianon and its interiors (generally in the Rococo style with medieval and Renaissance decorative items) were heavily inspired by the court of eighteenth-century France. In its architecture Biltmore House combined several Loire Valley French Renaissance châteaux, the interiors were lavish and filled with luxury furniture, tapestries and decorative objects. The 'Petit Chateau' included certain details taken from the Hôtel de Cluny, Paris and was the first example of a château-style mansion in the city. It served as inspiration for many more such buildings throughout the country. The house also helped to encourage a preference amongst the American upper classes for French-style interiors, with its library featuring sixteenth-century Renaissance paneling and Louis Quinze-style Salon which had been designed and built in Paris. Finally William K. Vanderbilt II sister-in-law, Theresa Fair Oelrichs (wife to Hermann Oelrichs, 1850-1906), modelled Rosecliff, Rhode Island, a summer home intended for large-scale entertaining, on the Grand Trianon.



Figure 317: The Breakers, c. early-twenty-first century

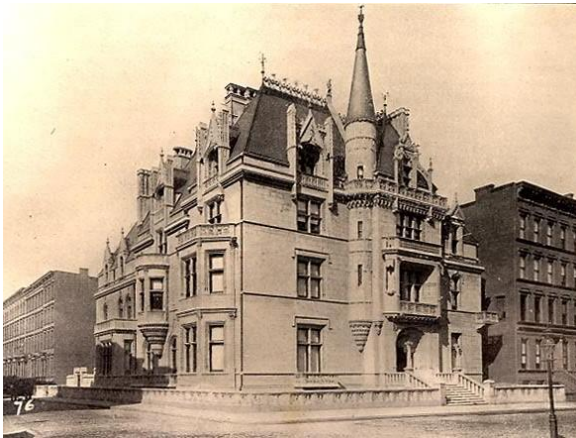


Figure 318: 'Petit Chateau' (William K. Vanderbilt House), c. 1890s



Figure 319: Marble House, c. early-twenty-first century (The Preservation Society of Newport County)



Figure 320: Biltmore House, c. early-twenty-first century



Figure 321: Rosecliff, c. early-twenty-first century (The Preservation Society of Newport County)

Such actions on the part of these families of course echoed those of the English Rothschild family. Yet there was an important difference of emphasis in their motivation for building such mansions and presenting them in the way described. The English Rothschild family created particular interiors and collections in their country residences which displayed their cultural acuity, education, considerable wealth and continental links in order to emphasise their social position. Mayer, his brother Anthony and their nephews Nathaniel, Alfred, Leopold and Ferdinand showed they could possess great numbers of the most opulent objects and create lavish interiors in which to entertain the best of society in their country houses in the Vale of Aylesbury. There is little evidence to show the Rothschild family were creating residences in order to fully imitate the most lavish of upper-class residences and claim membership of the aristocracy. Of course their mansions in the Vale of Aylesbury aided in further supporting their social position, but the family were already powerful and enjoyed a high social position. Indeed they wanted the trappings of wealth to further assure their position as one of the leading *nouveau-riche* families in Britain. American plutocrats who in the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century adopted a style of architecture, interior decoration and manner of living which has been identified with the term '*le goût Rothschild*' did so however precisely because they wished to identify with the aristocrats whose style they believed they were emulating, and whose objects they now possessed.

The fate of the Rothschild mansions of the Vale of Aylesbury

Mentmore House

Upon his death in 1874 Mayer left the entire Mentmore estate, Mentmore House and its contents to his only child, Hannah, who married the 5th Earl Rosebery four years later.¹³ Upon their marriage the couple united an immense amount of land and wealth. Hannah took a keen interest in Mentmore House and its collections in particular; Lord Rosebery was also an avid collector and upon his retirement from politics devoted much of his life to Mentmore, continuing to enlarge and embellish the collections of furniture, *objets d'art* and paintings.

Mentmore remained in the Rosebery family until 1977 when the house and its contents were offered to the Nation by the Rosebery Family in lieu of death duties, for a reported £3 million pounds.¹⁴ With severely limited financial resources as a result of multiple economic crises the Government of the day rejected the offer and instead the house was sold to the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Transcendental Meditation movement, which sought to maintain the fabric of the building and restore some of the larger rooms.¹⁵ After several years of discussion and campaigning by individuals and organisations the majority of the contents of the house were sent to auction, bar several items which remained in the Rosebery family. The Sotheby's auction was spread over nine days in May 1977 and became one of the major sales of the century.¹⁶ It raised over £6.4 million with only around £2 million worth of the contents ending up in national institutions.¹⁷ Today Mentmore House is a Grade I listed building and is owned by a private property developer. Its future is uncertain and has it been placed on the English Heritage 'Heritage at Risk Register' without immediate restoration plans in sight.

¹³ RAL, H&J K.34.3, Succession duty on real property of Hannah de Rothschild, derived from Baron Mayer de Rothschild under his will, re Mentmore, 1877; RAL 000/109, Various documents relating to the Legacies made upon the death of Baron Mayer de Rothschild, January 1875 to February 1880; RAL, 000/105 Probate of the Will of Mayer de Rothschild deceased, 2 January 1875.

¹⁴ 'Editorial: Muddle Over Mentmore', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXIX (March 1977), 157.

¹⁵ Katharine Lang, 'The Sale of the Decade? Mentmore Towers Hits the Market', *Country Life*, 191 (15 May 1997), 164.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Wills, 'Mentmore Towers under the Hammer', *Apollo*, 187 (1977), 163.

¹⁷ Frank Norman, 'Mentmore Mania', *Spectator*, 238, 7770 (4 June 1977), 12.



Figure 322: Mentmore in 1975 during the Sotheby's auction of the contents of the house

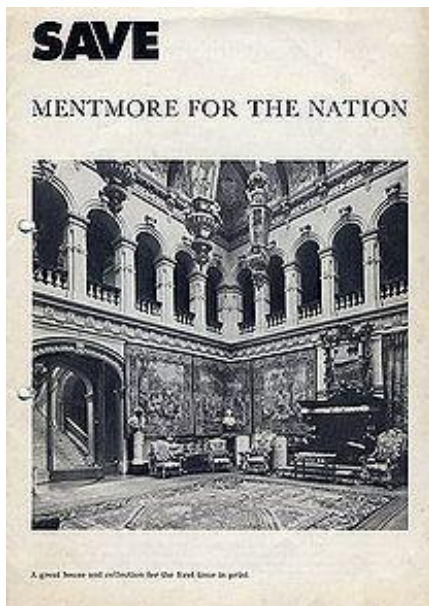


Figure 323: Cover of *SAVE Mentmore for the Nation* (booklet published by SAVE Britain's Heritage in 1977)



Figure 324: Mentmore House, 2010

Aston Clinton House

Following Anthony's death in 1876, his wife Louisa and her daughters (along with her eldest daughter's husband, Cyril Flower) retained Aston Clinton estate as a country residence. After Louisa's death in 1910 the estate reverted to Anthony's nephews (Nathaniel, Alfred and Leopold de Rothschild) jointly and the house was given over to the Commanding Officer of the Twenty-First Division during the First World War. Following the death of Nathaniel's son (Nathaniel Charles Rothschild, 1877-1923) the estate and house were sold by his executors.¹⁸ Acquired by Dr Albert Edward Bredin Crawford for £15,000 they were used as a boys' boarding school (though the park was sold separately). The house was sold again soon after and several more times in the next 20 years, it was often used as a hotel during this time.¹⁹ The mansion and park were eventually acquired by Buckinghamshire County Council in three lots from 1959 in 1967.²⁰ The house was entirely demolished in 1968 to make way for a training centre: nothing remains of it today.

¹⁸ RAL, H&J/L.164, Executors of the will of Hon. N. Charles Rothschild deceased to H&J re Mr A. E. B. Crawford's mortgage of Aston Clinton House, Park and Premises resulting from 1923 sale, March 1924.

¹⁹ The various owners from 1934 to 1954 included Howard Park Hotel, E.K. Cole (Echo Radios), H. M. Treasury, Thames Side Development Properties Ltd, and finally Green Park Hotel: CBS, DVA 1/2, Aylesbury Rural District Council Valuation List, 1934.

²⁰ Gulland, 'Aston Clinton House, Buckinghamshire', 32-37.



Figure 325: Green Park Training Centre, 2010 (Buckinghamshire County Council)

Tring Park House

Nathaniel Mayer Rothschild bequeathed the Tring Park estate to his youngest son, Nathaniel Charles Rothschild (1877-1923), known as Charles. The title of Lord Rothschild however fell to Charles's elder brother Lionel Walter who became 2nd Baron Rothschild (1868-1937). Walter devoted his life to the study of natural history and established his museum on the Tring estate, which he bequeathed to the nation upon his death. He continued to live at Tring Park until 1935.

Upon Charles's early death in 1923 the estate and house became the property of his nephew Nathaniel Mayer Victor Rothschild, 3rd Baron Rothschild (1910-1990), known as Victor. He offered Tring Park house and park to the British Museum but the offer was declined and instead retained the house but slowly broke up the estate.²¹ With the outbreak of the Second World War the mansion was for a time the home of the Rothschild Bank and after 1945 it was rented by the Arts Educational School. In 1971 the house was separated from the park by a bypass (the A41[M]). The southern part of the park was then sold to Dacorum Borough Council and the mansion was acquired by the Arts Educational School, which remains in residence today. The house is currently Grade II* listed.

²¹ Royal Society Archive, MDA/J1.4, Offer of Tring Park Mansion and Tring Park by Lord Rothschild presented to the Trustees of the British Museum, February 1939.



Figure 326: Tring Park House, 2010



Figure 327: Tring Park House, Dining Room, 2010

Halton House

The outbreak of the First World War brought to an end the lavish and grand entertainment for which Halton House was intended. Alfred was deeply patriotic and wanted to help in the service of his government during this time. He offered the use of the Halton estate (which he had expanded from around 1,500 acres to around 3,250 acres) to the British army, and Halton House was used as infantry officers' accommodation. The house and gardens slowly declined and were neglected. In 1918, upon Alfred's death, the 3,000 acre estate was inherited by his nephew, Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1882–1942); he offered it to the War Office and they purchased it in March 1919 for £112,000, the mansion

remains today in the possession of the Royal Air Force as an Officers' Mess and is Grade II listed.



Figure 328: Halton House, 2010



Figure 329: Halton House, c.2010 (Crown Copyright/MOD)

Ascott House

The Ascott estate was inherited by Leopold's third son Anthony Gustav de Rothschild (1887-1961) in 1917. Anthony himself made numerous alterations to the house and in 1937-8 it was extensively remodelled: 37 rooms were removed and much of the nineteenth-century exterior decoration was stripped away.²² Anthony was a renowned collector and at Ascott he amassed an impressive collection of eighteenth-century English

²² *Ascott, Buckinghamshire*, ed. by Robinson, p. 8.

portraits, eighteenth-century English furniture, and over 400 pieces of Chinese ceramics. During the Second World War Ascott was used as accommodation for Chelsea Pensioners. As the war ended Anthony decided to donate the house and its collections to the National Trust, in whose care they remain today. The house is Grade II* listed.



Figure 330: Ascott House, 2009

Waddesdon Manor

Following Ferdinand's death in 1898, the Waddesdon estate and Waddesdon Manor were left to his sister Alice who maintained the house, collections and grounds. Alice in turn left the house and estate to her French-born great-nephew James Armand de Rothschild (1878-1957) in 1922. During the Second World War around 100 child evacuees from London lived in the main part of the house and upon his death in 1957 James bequeathed the 165 acre estate, the house, and certain of its contents to the National Trust, along with a large endowment. Today the Grade I listed house and its collections are open to the public, under the management and care of the National Trust and in collaboration with a charitable trust chaired by Jacob, 4th Baron Rothschild (b. 1936).

Today Waddesdon is extremely popular with the general public and receives a great deal of academic interest.²³ This thesis has revealed however that there were once many more Rothschild houses on a scale such as Waddesdon in the Vale of Aylesbury, all filled with collections of equal quantity and of a very comparable style: a truly exceptional grouping of houses and nineteenth-century collectors within a mere 15 miles in the Buckinghamshire countryside.

²³ In 2007-08 it was the National Trust's second most visited paid-entry property, with 386,544 visitors



Figure 331: Evacuated children at Waddesdon Manor, c. 1940



Figure 332: Waddesdon Manor, Red Room, 2009 (National Trust)



Figure 333: Waddesdon Manor map (National Trust)

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Appendix One
Transcripts of Notable Primary Documents

Mentmore

RAL, 000/848/16 The Baron M. A. Rothschild and Mr G.E.O. Myers, copy contract for the erection of a mansion at Mentmore, 24 October 1851

This Indenture made the 24th day of October One thousand eight-hundred and fifty one Between The Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild of Mentmore in the County of Bucks of the first part George Myers of Lambeth Contractor of the second part Matthew Smith of Potter Newton near Leeds in the County of York Stone Merchant and John Aster of Headingly in the same County Stone Merchant of the third part.

Whereas the said Mayer Amschel de Rothschild hath resolved to build a Mansion House at Mentmore aforesaid upon a certain site already allotted and staked out and hath caused a Specification for the Carcase of the said Mansion with Plans Sections and Drawings of the various works to be done in erecting completing finishing and executing the same to be prepared by Sir Joseph Paxton of Chatsworth in the County of Derby.

And whereas the said Mayer Amschel de Rothschild hath accepted the Tender so received from the said George Myers and it has therefore been agreed by and between the said parties hereto that such Contract shall be made between them for the execution of the said works as is herein mentioned.

'Mentmore', *The Builder*, XV (19 December 1857), 738-40

Mentmore Bucks, the Seat of Baron M. A. de Rothschild. Lately erected from the designs of Sir Joseph Paxton and Mr George Henry Stokes.

It is about 11/2 mile west of the Cheddington station on the London and North-Western Railway and is situated on an eminence which commands a fine view of the Vale of Aylesbury, the Dunstable Downs and the Chiltern and Barnham hills. The style adopted by desire of the Baron for the exterior is that which prevailed during the early part of the reign of James I, and of which Wollaton Hall, Notts, is perhaps the finest example. A difference in the combination and arrangement has contributed to produce grouping of a picturesque character and outline, and the details and ornament are understood to be the result of a careful study and examination of the works of John of Padua. The mansion is built entirely of Ancaster stone, of fine quality and colour: the cornices are highly enriched; and the frieze of each order is filled in with carved panels and heads.

The approach to the mansion is by a court, flanked on one side by the screen wall of the servants' offices. Niches are formed in each of these walls, for the reception of statues. The entrance-porch is of sufficient width to admit of carriages passing through, and has a groined stone-ceiling elaborately carved. From the sub-hall, which is lined with Caen stone, and paved with Sicilian and Ronge Royal marbles, a flight of marble steps leads to the arched corridor, which forms means of communication between the suite of

apartments on the ground floor and offices. The grand hall is about 48 feet by 40 feet, and 40 feet high, and is separated from the sub-hall by the corridor just mentioned. At this end of the hall are inserted three arches, the whole height of the ground-floor, filled with polished plate-glass. The entrance to the interior is through the centre arch which forms a doorway.

At the level of the chamber-floor this grand hall is surrounded by corridors, and an open arcade of great beauty and richness: each area of which is filled with a balustrade of alabaster and green marble. This arcade, with its richly-moulded arches, carving and ornaments is striking and effective, and imparts both character and variety to the interior. Immediately above the arcade is the main cornice, from which spring the coved ceiling and walnut ribs, which divide it into compartments; stone heads carved by Monti, are placed in the frieze beneath each rib, and the compartments of the coved ceiling are filled with ornamental shields, scrolls and foliage. The hall is lighted from the top, the roof being constructed externally on the ridge and furrow principle. This ridge and furrow roof is supported in wrought-iron riveted girders, to which also is fixed the framework of the ceiling, consisting of moulded walnut ribs, filled with glass manufactured expressly for the purpose.

The grand staircase occupies the side of the hall opposite to the vestibule of the garden-entrance, and consists of one wide central flight of steps of solid Sicilian marble; on either side of which is a deeply recessed arch with coffered ceiling; a flight of steps on each side leads from the landing to the corridor surrounding the grand hall. The ceiling is divided into panels by moulded walnut ribs, the soffits of which are enriched with guilloche ornament. Some departure has been made from the style of the exterior, in the decoration of the principal apartments, the dining-room, drawing-room, &c. Being elaborately finished and decorated according to the styles which prevailed in France during the reigns of Francis I and Louis XIV, XV and XVI.

The servants' offices are also built of Ancaster stone, and are in the same style as the mansion. They form four sides of a quadrangle, the entrance to which is through an arched gateway. The whole of the rooms are fitted with every requisite. The kitchen, pantry, and larder are lighted from the roof. The kitchen is provided with all necessary appurtenances, which were supplied and fitted by Messrs. Temple and Reynolds, Prices-Ostreet, Cavendish-square. Direct communication is obtained with the mansion by steps leading from the passage near the kitchen; the kitchen, scullery and other rooms appertaining to it, being thus placed in a nearly central position.

The mansion is warmed throughout by hot-water pipes and provision is made for ventilating each room, by the admission of fresh, and the removal of vitiated air. The whole of the windows are fitted with copper casements, and glazed with plate-glass, supplied by Mr Alfred Goslett, of Soho-square. The hot-water apparatus and bell-hanging were executed by Mr May, engineer, Dean-street, Holborn.

The contractor for the works was Mr George Myers of Lambeth, by whom the whole has been executed in a most excellent and substantial manner, under the able superintendence of Mr John Jones, the clerk of works.

Aston Clinton

RAL, H&J/S.62, Particulars and Conditions of Sale of the Aston Clinton Estate, 27
September 1836

BUCKS, BETWEEN TRING AND AYLESBURY
THE FREEHOLD MANOR OF ASTON CLINTON

Sporting Residence, Park, Farms and Woods;
Also a Corn Mill. Dwelling Houses and Cottages
ONE THOUSAND & EIGHTY-THREE ACRES

Tythe-Free

The Particulars and Conditions of Sale

Of a Most Desirable

FREEHOLD AND TYTHE-FREE ESTATE

(Except about Thirty Acres Leasehold for long Terms of Years)

Situate In a Beautiful Part of the County of Bucks

On the Borders of Hertfordshire,

The Turnpike Road to London passes through the Estate which is distant from Aylesbury,
Four Miles; Tring and Wendover, Three Miles; and THIRTY-FOUR FROM LONDON;

Consisting of

THE MANOR OF ASTON CLINTON

With Quit Rents &c.

A SHOOTING BOX,

With extensive PLANTATIONS and PLEASURE GROUNDS, a fine PARK, pleasingly
Timbered;

Sundry Farms of good Land, with suitable Farming Buildings,

A WATER CORN MILL, AND DWELLING ADJOINING,

EXTENSIVE WOODS,

Forming a fine COVER for and well stocked with GAME. The Whole Estate containing
One Thousand and Eighty-three Acres

And let (except the Residence, Gardens, Pleasure Grounds and Woods, which are in
hand) to respectable Tenants.

Also SEVERAL DWELLING HOUSES, WITH GARDENS, &C.

In the Village of Aston Clinton

The Estate offers a most eligible SPORTING RESIDENCE, as well as a secure Investment
of Capital.

The Wendover Navigable Canal runs through the Estate, offering facility to obtain Manure
and send Produce to the London Markets.

The Estate abounds with Game; there is good Trout Fishing; is within the Nerkley Hunt,
and Eight Miles of the Duke of Grafton's Hounds; Two Packs of Harriers are kept in the
Neighbourhood.

Which will be Sold by Auction,

By Messrs. FAREBROTHER and CO

At Garaway's Coffee House, 'Change Alley, Cornhill, London,

On Tuesday, 27th of September, 1836, at 12 o'Clock,

The Manor of Aston Clinton

Alias Chivery Cum Cheddington

A SPORTING RESIDENCE

With Lawn, Pleasure Grounds and Shrubbery,
 With Extensive Shaded Walks, Fish Pond, &c.
 And Adjoining the Pleasingly Timbered Park.

The House contains

On the First Floor – Four Best Bed Rooms, and Five secondary and Servant's Sleeping Rooms.

On the Ground Floor – An Entrance, with Cheerful bow Window Drawing Room, and a Dining Room with Recesses for Sideboards.

The Offices Comprise

Man Servant's Sleeping Room, Housemaid's Closet, good Kitchen, Housekeeper's Room, Butler's Pantry, Servant's Hall, Scullery, China Closet, Larder, Dairy and Water Closet.

Enclosed Yard with Wash-house and Laundry,

Double Coach-House, Two Two-Stall Stables and Loose Box,

Dog Kennel, Boiling House, Two Harness Rooms, Blacksmith's Shop with Forge &c., Carpenter's Shop, Wood-house and other Erections.

An extensive and well planted Garden & Orchard and Paddock of Land,

The whole containing

Twenty-eight Acres and Twenty-eight Perches,

No. 42 The House, Buildings, Garden, Pleasure Grounds &c. A.7 R.2 P.27

25,39,44,48 and 65 Different Plantations A.16 R.3 P.13

Part of 41 Planted (including Road to House) A.28 R.0 P.28

CBS, BAS 666/28, Indenture, 25 December 1854

25th December 1854 Indenture between Baron Lionel of New Court and Charles Edward Gee Barnard of 35 Lincolns Inn Fields in the County of Middlesex and the Reverend Charles Watkin Wynne Eyton of Aston Clinton, rector of the said parish of Aston Clinton. Whereas the said Baron hath lately purchased of the said Charles Edward Gee Barnard a certain Messuage or Beerhouse cottage and hereditaments adjoining thereto situate in the village of Aston Clinton aforesaid for the purpose of pulling down and removing the said Messuage and other Buildings in order to improve the approach to the Mansion house and pleasure grounds of the said Baron...

'Property', *The Times*, 9 June 1849, p. 11

On the border of Hertfordshire, near to Aylesbury, Tring, and Wendover, Bucks – The Freehold Manor of Aston Clinton, newly erected Sporting Residence, with Offices of every description, small Park, well arranged tithe-free Farms, Dwelling Houses, &c; the whole about 900 acres of productive Land, abounding with game, and a fine trout stream running through the estate.

Messrs. Farebrother, Clark, and Lye will sell, at the George Inn, Aylesbury, on Friday, July 27, by direction of the Mortgagees, under a powe of sale, the valuable Freehold and Tithe-free estate, in the county of Bucks, bordering on Hertfordshire, three miles from Tring and Wendover, and three from Aylesbury; consisting of the manor of Aston Clinton with a newly erected residence suitable for a family respectability, with offices, gardens, orchard, pleasure ground, and a small park; also the Home Farm, Church and Hill Farms; a detached dwelling house, let to Captain Prescott, and several dwelling houses and cottages in and near Aston Clinton. The estate offers a most eligible residence and secure

investment of capital. A fine trout-stream runs through the property. The farms comprise a portion of superior wheat and bean land, with some of a lighter description for the turnip system, and the down land is remarkably sound and health sheep pasture.

RAL, H&J/A.11.1, Abstract of the title of Anthony de Rothschild to hereditaments at Aston Clinton Bucks, 1 June 1875

THIS INDENTURE made the 1st day of June 1875 BETWEEN BARON LIONEL NATHAN DE ROTHSCHILD of Gunnersbury Park in the County of Middlesex of the one part and SIR ANTHONY NATHAN DE ROTHSCHILD of No.2 Grosvenor Place House in the said County of Middlesex Baronet of the other part WHEREAS the said Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild is desirous that in case his present wife should survive him she should have the use and enjoyment during her life of so much of the "Aston Clinton Estate" and of the "Halton Estate" as is in his occupation AND the said Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild has agreed to enter into these presents for the purpose of enabling the said Anthony Nathan de Rothschild to give effect by his Will to such desire NOW THIS INDENTURE WITNESSETH that He the said Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild doth hereby Give and Grant unto the said Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild full right and absolute authority by Will or Codicil to devise to his present Wife should she survive him the use and enjoyment during her life of the said Mansion and Park and so much of the Estate called The Aston Clinton Estate and the Halton Estate as is in the actual occupation of the said Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild now holds uses and enjoys the same IT BEING HEREBY EXPRESSLY DECLARED that the management and sale of the Woods on the said Halton Estate shall continue and be conducted as heretofore. In WITNESS whereof the said parties to these presents have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year first above written. SIGNED SEALED and DELIVERED by the above named Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild and Sir Anthony Nathan de Rothschild Baronet in the presence of. Richard Dawes 9 Angle Court Throgmorton Street London Solr.

Tring Park

Of Building: Roger North's Writings on Architecture, ed. by H. M. Colvin and J. Newman, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 73-4

The former was the Invention of Sr Chr Wren and I think it ye only intire hous he hath done, except Winchester wch is left in a deplorable state. My Guys hous is of 3 ranges and one thing...in ye Contrivances at ye Entrance is remarkable. Ye stairs ascending to ye first or hall floor are not without but within a room which serves as a porch, this was not so in the first designe, but altered. And in so larg a house, when a room can be spared for ye use of a porch it is very convenient. So this porch room is in the middle, and from the landing they give on each hand to 2 rooms on either side of it. And there are two little flts of stairs ascending between them, this is ye first rang. The second is ye great hall and stairs. The hall is from ye entrance, ye whole length northwards... towards ye left, and ye passage is... from ye door, to ye back rang, & then takes a withdrawing room, or Great Parlour, I remember not well which, ye height of ye hall are two full storeys of ye order and ye ceiling is ye floor of ye Garrette. This is too high and doth not conforme to ye other dimensions of ye room. It is lighted only at one end with 6 windows...3 is each storey one over ye other, and in ye place of ye floor between them is made a balustrade passage athwart ye end and from one side of ye hous to ye other. These three windows in breadth take up too much of ye room and ye pairs are too little. So yt the light is not easy and naturall, but constrained & hudled. At the other end of ye hall is a double order of Columns wch make a screen and carry a floor upon ye entablature of ye first wch is a Gallery above and ye entrance of ye house is underneath it. Ye upper order goes to ye ceiling and beneath ye gallery above. This Gallery is the landing of the great stairs so is a principall member of the ordnance above. Ye Great staires make (with ye hall and under the Gallery yt lys open to it) the middle rang, and ly in ye light of ye entrance, and doth not run out that way so far as the other ranges. So that the kitchen comes in there in a low building it fills the Notch and extends outwards as much beyond the other ranges but it is no higher, than permitting fair windows to ye stairs above it, this is all excellently contrived, ffor it doth not robb ye Great stairs of light and being do much without ye hous prevents ye annoyance to ye hous by smell. But when you are ris up to ye best landing, wch is ye Gallery to ye hall then was a very great defect in the height, wch ye surveyor hath helped by sacrificing ye garrett, and from ye ceiling a shell is lifted up, Cuppulo wise over ye Gallery wch looks well underneath but above is a monster. This preceeds from the Impracticability of accommodating several purposes in one and the same order of building as hath bin, more than once, observed.

'Property', *The Times*, 20 July 1820, p. 4

The very capital, valuable, and highly desirable Tring Park Estate, tithe-free, excepting about 284 acres, in the parishes of Tring, Wiggington, and Aldbury, Herts; and of Marsworth, Cheddington, and Drayton Beauchamp, Bucks, 5 miles from Great Berkhamstead, and 31 from London: consisting of the Manor of Tring, with its rights, loyalties, quit rents, fines, heriots and right of sporting over 3,000 acres and upwards, abounding with game, and with extensive covers preserving the game: noble mansion, a regular substantial pile of buildings, containing a magnificent entrance-hall, 30 feet high and 60 feet long, paved with marble, and terminated by a double screen of columns, forming an approach to a grand staircase, which ascends to a music gallery, or ball room,

75 feet long by 16 feet, intersecting the first floor: a grand range of lofty apartments on each side of the hall, among which are dining rooms and drawing rooms, each near 37 feet by 22 feet, library, billiard room, &c.: abundant accommodation on the bedchamber and attic floors for a numerous family of distinction, and for a large establishment of domestics; stabling, pleasure grounds, kitchen garden, hot-house, ice-house, &c.: the mansion seated on a commanding spot, environed by a beautiful park, which is moulded by the hands of nature into swelling lawns, and crowned by a lofty amphitheatre of woods, among the finest in the kingdom: several hill farms with covers for game, and other farms, with land of superior quality in the vale, with the Grand Junction canal and the collateral cut to Wendover passing through them: also the Tolls of the Market, and the Market-house, and Freehold dwellings in the town of Tring, the Enclosures contiguous, with store fish ponds, and command of water capable of turning a water-corn-mill: a part of the latter tithe-free farms, and the tithes of 1,148 acres in Wiggington are held by a renewable lease of Christ Church, Oxford and Trinity College, Cambridge, being altogether a demesne and estate of 4,350 acres. In hand or let to tenants on leases, or at will, and forming a truly distinguished property for a family residence and investment.

CBS, DX258/13, Particulars and conditions of sale, Tring Park Estate, 7 May 1872.

Particulars and Conditions of Sale

FREEHOLD (and small part copyhold)

RESIDENTIAL DOMAIN

Known as TRING PARK

Thirty-one miles from London, One Mile and a half from Tring Station on the North Western Railway, Fifty Minutes' journey from Euston, Seven Miles from Aylesbury, and Five from Great Berkhamstead. It comprises

3643 ACRES

OF ARABLE, PASTURE AND WOODLAND

Lying in the Parishes of Tring, Wiggington, Aldbury, and Puttenham in the County of Herts and Marsworth, Cheddington and Drayton Beauchamp in the County of Bucks; together with

A NOBLE MANSION

And a magnificent timbered

DEER PARK OF 300 ACRES,

Beautifully varied in Hill and Dale, and having a very fine Hanging Wood and Rookery, stretching into the Vale from a bold Hill, the summit of which furnishes rich and extensive Views into the adjoining Counties,

STABLING FOR SIXTEEN HORSES.

Two Double Coach-houses, Brew House, Venison House, Lofts &c. Farm Yard with Barn, Stalls for Ten Cows, and numerous useful Buildings. The lands are divided into

NUMEROUS COMPACT FARMS,

With convenient Houses and Homesteads in the occupation of a well-satisfied and punctual Tenantry of long standing, at moderate Rents; including also

THE TRING SILK MILL, WITH ITS MACHINERY.,

The Manor Brewery, 'Green Man' Inn, numerous Shops and Houses. The whole Estate producing an actual Rental, amounting, with the small portion in hand and unlet, to nearly £6000 PER ANNUM,

Which will be Sold in its entirety including the valuable Manor of Great Tring, with the Rights, Royalties, and extensive Interests attached thereto, thus securing to an Owner the advantage of great Local and Political Influence.

THE SPORTING

Is of an unusually attractive character, affording capital Partridge and Hare Shooting, with numerous well-stocked Coverts, excellent well-preserved Fishing and Fowling in the extensive Reservoirs of the Grand Junction Canal Company, and the right of Free Warren and Free Chase over the whole Manor, comprising upwards of 8000 Acres. The district is Hunted by the "O.B.H" and Mr Leigh's Hounds and the Meets of Baron Rothschild's Stag Hounds are within easy distance.

Which will be Sold by Auction, by Messrs.

CHINNOCK, GALSWORTHY, & CHINNOCK,

The Persons appointed by the said Judge, in conjunction with Mr Parkes of Tring,

At the Auction Mart, Tokenhouse Yard, in the City of London

On Tuesday, May the 7th, 1872,

At One for Two o'clock precisely

Particulars of the Freehold Residential Domain Known as Tring Park

Situate close to the Capital Market Town of Tring

Thirty-one Miles only from London, One Mile and a half from the Tring Railway Station on the North Western Railway; Fifty Minutes' Journey from Euston; Seven Miles from Aylesbury; and Five from Great Berkhamstead.

It comprises A MANSION

Most substantially built and of uniform elevation, with handsome Portico, covered Entrance, and flight of stone steps, which occupies a commanding position on a slight eminence in the midst of a Beautiful Deer Park of nearly 300 Acres.

With Extensive Views of the rich Home Scenery of the Park and Estate, as well as the Picturesque Country around, and is approached from the London Road by

A FINE AVENUE OF HORSE CHESNUT AND BEECH TREES

And from the Town of Tring by an Avenue of Limes and Beeches

There is also a wide Avenue of Limes known as 'The Nell Gwynne Avenue, with a Fish Pond,

The Mansion is said to have been built by Sir Christopher Wren,

And is a noble pile of buildings in Brick with Stuccoed Exterior and Slated Roof, the Lower Story being composed of massive Groined Arches.

From the Doric Portico which extends across the Carriage Drive the Entrance is by a flight of Stone Steps enclosed with glass doors and side lights, into

Tring Town Farm. 230a.0r.11p £345 per annum rent

Hastoe Farm 122a.0r.11p £100

Wick Farm 335.2.26 £320

Hastoe Brick Field 15.1.18 £25

Shire Lane Farm 34.1.0 £26

Tring Grange Farm 414.0.17 £335

Woodrow Farm 141.3.1 £139

Hill Green Farm 117.2.5 £155

Dunsley and Kiln Farms £250.1.14 £413

Park Hill Farm 151.0.26 £200

Gammel Farm 118.3.18 £250

Lands at Harry's Ash 50.3.36 £107

Marsworth Great Farm 197.0.32 £242

Marsworth Little Farm 22.3.4 £42

Lands at Gubblecote 14.3.21 £36

Lands at Longmarston 40.0.31 £50

Marlin's Field 4.1.32 £8 8s
 Tring Mead 1.2.33 £4
 Grass Fields Adjoining Folly Farm 4.1.39 £10
 Lands at Astrope 9.1.27 £25
 Wilstone Great Farm 177.3.23 £354
 Wilstone Little Farm 103.3.31 £166
 Misswell Farm 246.3.4 £323
 Parsonage Bottom Farm 33.1.33 £78
 Dundale Lands 70.1.20 £150
 Detached Lands 52.1.25 £177 11s
 The Tring Silk Mill £350
 Cottages at Silk Mill 6.2.9 £118 14s
 The Manor Brewery 0.1.17 £48
 The Green Man Inn 8.2.28 £115
 The Market House and Lofts £19 18s
 Houses and Shops in and about the Town of Tring £366 14s 6.0.7
 Cheddington Rectory rent £1 8s
 The Manor of Great Tring £38 5s
 Cottages and Gardens on the Estate £213 15s

 Estimated value of property £5932 13s

Halton**RAL, H&J/Plans 1.1.5, Indenture, 24 June 1853**

The Indenture made the 24th day of June 1853 Between Sir George Henry Dashwood of West Wycombe in the County of Buckinghamshire Baronet of the first part Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild of the City of London of the second part and Thomas Dawes of Angel Court Throgmorton Street in the City of London Gentleman of the third part Whereas the said Sir George Henry Dashwood is seized or otherwise well entitled to dispose of the freehold hereditament intended to be hereby assured for an estate of inheritance in fee simple absolute and of the copyhold. And whereas the said Sir George Henry Dashwood lately contracted with the said Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild for the absolute sale to him of the said freehold and copyhold hereditaments free from incumbrances except as hereinafter mentioned for the sum of £47,500

RAL, H&J/L.18, Abstract of title of Mr Lionel de Rothschild to hereditaments forming part of the Halton Estate in the County of Buckingham, 30 September 1879

The Manor or Lordship or reputed Manor or Lordship of Halton in the County of Buckingham and the advowson donation right of patronage and presentation of and into the Rectory or parish Church of Halton aforesaid and the tithes rent charge in lieu of tithes Glebe Lands and hereditaments belonging to the dame Rectory or Parish Church and also the Capital and other messuages closes pieces or parcels of land and other the hereditaments in the Parishes of Halton Wendover and Weston Turville in the County of Bucks coloured Green on the plan annexed to abstracting presents and described in the 1st and 2nd parts of the 2nd Schedule to an Indenture dated the 24th day of June 1853 and made between Sir George Henry Dashwood of the first part Baron Lionel de Rothschild of the 2nd part and Thomas Dawes of the 3rd part and all other if any the hereditaments therein comprised and expressed to be thereby granted conveyed or otherwise assured.